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MYSTERY AT GENEVA

An improbable tale of singular happenings

by

ROSE MACAULAY

Author of "Dangerous Ages," "Potterism," etc.

ὅστις τοῖα ἔχει ἐν ἡδονῇ ἔχει ἐν ἡδονῇ τοῖα.

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MYSTERY AT GENEVA

NEW NOVELS

TYLER OF BARNET — BERNARD GILBERT

PILGRIM'S REST — F. BRETT YOUNG

PIRACY — MICHAEL ARLEN

BEANSTALK — MRS. HENRY DUDENEY

ROSEANNE — E. MARIA ALBANESI

BIG PETER — ARCHIBALD MARSHALL

NOTE

As I have observed among readers and critics a tendency to discern satire where none is intended, I should like to say that this book is simply a straightforward mystery story, devoid of irony, moral or meaning. It has for its setting an imaginary session of the League of Nations Assembly, but it is in no sense a study of, still less a skit on, actual conditions at Geneva, of which indeed I know little, the only connection I have ever had with the League being membership of its Union.

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I

HENRY, looking disgusted, as well he might, picked his way down the dark and dirty corkscrew stairway of the dilapidated fifteenth century house where he had rooms during the fourth (or possibly it was the fifth) Assembly of the League of Nations. The stairway, smelling of fish and worse, opened out on to a narrow cobbled alley that ran between lofty mediæval houses down from the Rue du Temple to the Quai du Seujet, in the ancient wharfside quarter of Saint Gervais.

Henry, pale and melancholy, his soft hat slouched over his face, looked what he was, a badly paid newspaper correspondent lodging in unclean rooms. He looked hungry; he looked embittered; he looked like one of the under dogs, whose time had not come yet, would, indeed, never come. He looked, however, a gentleman, which, in the usual sense of the word, he was not. He was of middle height, slim and not

inelegant of build; his trousers, though shiny, were creased in the right place; his coat fitted him though it lacked two buttons, and he dangled a monocle, which he screwed impartially now into one brown eye, now into the other. If any one would know, as they very properly might, whether Henry was a bad man or a good, I can only reply that we are all of us mixed, and most of us not very well mixed.

Henry was, in fact, at the moment a journalist, and wrote for the *British Bolshevist*, a revolutionary paper with a startlingly small circulation; and now the reader knows the very worst of Henry, which is to say a great deal, but must, all the same, be said.

Such as he was, Henry, on this fine Sunday morning in September, strolled down the Allée Petit Chat, which did not seem to him, as it seems to most English visitors, in the least picturesque, for Henry was a quarter Italian, and preferred new streets and buildings to old. Having arrived at the Quai du Mont Blanc, he walked along it, brooding on this and that, gazing with a bitter kind

of envy at the hotels which were even now opening their portals to those more fortunate than he—the Bergues, the Paix, the Beau Rivage, the Angleterre, the Russie, the Richemond. All these hostels were, on this Sunday morning before the opening of the Assembly, receiving the delegates of the nations, their staffs and secretaries, and even journalists. Crowds of little grave-faced Japs processed into the Hotel de la Paix; the entrance hall of Les Bergues was alive with the splendid, full-throated converse of Latin Americans ("Ah, they live, those Spaniards!" Henry sighed); while at the Beau Rivage the British Empire and the Dominions hastened, with the morbid ardour of their race, to plunge into baths after their night journey.

Baths, thought Henry bitterly. There were no baths in the Allée Petit Chat. All his bathing must be done in the lake—and cold comfort that was. Henry was no lover of cold water: he preferred it warm.

These full-fed, well-housed, nobly cleaned delegates. . . . Henry quite untruly reported to his newspaper, which resented

the high living of others, that some of them occupied as many as half a dozen rooms apiece in the hotels, with their typists, their secretaries, and their sycophantic suites.

Even the journalists, lodging less proudly in smaller hotels, or in apartments, all lodged cleanly, all decently, excepting only Henry, the accredited representative of the *British Bolshevist*.

Bitterly and proudly, with a faint sneer twisting his lips, Henry, leaning against the lake-side parapet, watched the tumultuous arrival of the organisers of peace on earth. The makers of the new world. What new world? Where tarried it? How slow were its makers at their creative task! Slow and unsure, thought Henry, whose newspaper was not of those who approved the League.

With a sardonic smile Henry turned on his heel and pursued his way along the Quai towards that immense hotel where the League Secretariat lived and moved and had its being. He would interview some one there and try to secure a good place in the press gallery. The Secretariat officials were kind to journalists, even to journalists on the

British Bolshevist, a newspaper which was of no use to the League, and which the Secretariat despised, as they might despise the yapping of a tiresome and insignificant small dog.

2

The Secretariat were in a state of disturbance and expectation. The annual break in their toilsome and rather tedious year was upon them. For a month their labours would be, indeed, increased, but life would also move. One wearied of Geneva, its small and segregated society, its official gossip, the Calvinistic atmosphere of the natives, its dreary winter, its oppressive summer, its eternal lake and distant mountains, its horrid little steamboats rushing perpetually across and across from one side of the water to the other—one wearied of Geneva as a place of residence. What was it (though it had its own charm) as a dwelling-place for those of civilised and cosmopolitan minds? Vienna, now, would be better; or Brussels: even the poor old

Hague, with its ill-fated traditions. Or, said the French members of the staff, Paris. For the French nation and government were increasingly attached to the League, and had long thought that Paris was its fitting home. It would be safer there.

However, it was at Geneva, and it was very dull except at Assembly time, or when the Council were in session. Assembly time was stimulating and entertaining. One saw then people from the outside world; things hummed. Old friends gathered together, new friends were made. The nations met, the Assembly assembled, committees committeed, the Council councilled, grievances were aired and either remedied or not; questions were raised and sometimes solved; governments were petitioned, commissions were sent to investigate, quarrels were pursued, judgments pronounced, current wars deplored, the year's work reviewed. Eloquence rang from that world-platform, to be heard at large, through the vastly various voices of a thousand newspapers, in a hundred rather apathetic countries.

In spite of the great eloquence, industry,

intelligence, and many activities of the delegates, there was, in that cosmopolitan and cynical body, the Secretariat, a tendency to regard them, *en masse*, rather as children to be kept in order, though to be given a reasonable amount of liberty in such harmless amusements as talking on platforms. Treats, dinners and excursions were arranged for them; the Secretariat liked to see them having a good time. They would meet in the Assembly Hall each morning to talk, before an audience; noble sentiments would then exalt and move the nations and be flashed across Europe by journalists. But in the afternoons they would cross the lake again to the Palais des Nations, and meet in Rooms A, B, C, or D, round tables (magic phrase! magic arrangement of furniture and human beings!) in large or small groups, and do the work. The Assembly Hall was, so to speak, the front window, where the goods were displayed, but where one got away with the goods was in the back parlour. There, too, the fiercest international questions boiled up, boiled over, and were cooled by the calming temperature

of the table and the sweet but firm reasonableness of some of the representatives of the more considerable powers. The committee meetings were, in fact, not only more effective than the Assembly meetings, but more stimulating, more amusing.

Henry, entering the Palais des Nations, found it in a state of brilliant bustle. The big hall hummed with animated talk and cheerful greetings in many tongues, and members of the continental races shook one another ardently and frequently by the hand. How dull it would be, thought Henry, if ever the Esperanto people got their way, and the flavour of the richly various speech of the nations was lost in one colourless, absurd and inorganic language, stumblingly spoken and ill understood.

Henry entered a lift, was enclosed with a cynical American, a brilliant-looking Spaniard, a tall and elegant woman of assurance and beauty, and an intelligent-faced cosmopolitan who looked like a British-Italian-Latin-American-Finn, which, in point of fact, he was. Alighting at the third floor, Henry found his way to the

department he required and introduced himself to one of its officials, who gave him a pink card assigning him to a seat in the press gallery, which he felt would not be one he would really like.

"You've not been out here before, have you," said the official, and Henry agreed that this was so.

"Well, of course we don't expect much of a show from your fanatical paper. . . ." The official was good-humoured, friendly, and tolerant. The Secretariat were, indeed, sincerely indifferent to the commentary on their proceedings both of the *Morning Post* and the *British Bolshevist*, for both could be taken for granted. One of these journals feared that the League sought disarmament, the other that it did not; to one it was a league of cranks, conscientious objectors, and (fearful and sinister word) internationals, come not to destroy but to fulfil the Covenant, bent on carrying out Article 8, substituting judiciary arbitration for force, and treating Germany as a brother; to the other it was a league of militarist and capitalist states, an extension of the Supreme Allied Council,

bent on destroying Article 18 and other inconvenient articles of the Covenant, and treating Germany as a dog. To both it was, in one word, Poppycock. Sincerely, honestly, and ardently, both these journals thought like that. They could not help it; it was temperamental, and the way they saw things.

3

Henry descended the broad and shallow double stairway of the Palais des Nations, up and down which tripped the gay crowds who knew one another but knew not him, and so out to lunch, which he had poorly, inexpensively, obscurely and alone, at a low eating-house near the Secretariat. After lunch he had coffee at a higher eating-house, on the Quai, and sat under the pavement awning reading the papers, listening to the band, looking at the mountain view across the lake, and waiting until the other visitors to Geneva, having finished their more considerable luncheons, should emerge from

their hotels and begin to walk or drive along the Quai. Meanwhile he read *L'Humeur*, which he found on the table before him. But *L'Humeur* is not really very funny. It has only one joke, only one type of comic picture: a woman incompletely dressed. Was that, Henry speculated, really funny? It happens, after all, to nearly all women at least every morning and every evening. Was it really funny even when to the lady thus unattired there entered a gentleman, either M. l'Amant or M. le Mari?

Was only one thing funny, as some persons believed? Was it indeed really funny at all? Henry, who honestly desired to brighten his life, tried hard to think so, but failed, and relapsed into gloom. He could not see that it was funnier that a female should not yet have completed her toilet than that a male should not. Neither was funny. Nothing, perhaps, was funny. The League of Nations was not funny. Life was not funny, and probably not death. Even the *British Bolshevist*, which he was reduced to reading, wasn't funny, though it did have on the front page a column

headed "Widow's Leap Saves Cat from Burning House."

A young man sat down at Henry's little table and ordered drink; a bright, neat, brisk young man, with an alert manner. Glancing at the *British Bolshevist*, he made a conversational opening which elicited the fact that Henry represented this journal at Geneva. For himself, he was, it transpired, correspondent of the *Daily Sale*, a paper to which the *British Bolshevist* was politically opposed but temperamentally sympathetic; they had the same cosy, chatty touch on life.

The two correspondents amused themselves by watching the delegates and other foreign arrivals strolling to and fro along the elegant spaciousness of the Quai, chatting with one another. They noticed little things to write to their papers about, such as hats, spats, ways of carrying umbrellas and sticks, and so forth. They overheard fragments of conversation in many tongues. For, clustering round about the Assembly, were the representatives, official and unofficial, of nearly all the world's nations, so that Henry heard in the space of ten minutes British,

French, Italians, Russians, Poles, Turks, Americans, Armenians, Dutch, Irish, Lithuanians, Serb - Croat - Slovenes, Czecho-Slovakians, the dwellers in Dalmatia and Istria, and in the parts of Latin America about Brazil, Assyrio-Chaldeans, and newspaper correspondents, all speaking in their tongues the wonderful works of God. Geneva was like Pentecost, or the Tower of Babel. There were represented there very many societies, which regularly settled in Geneva for the period of the Assembly in order to send it messages, trusting thus to bring before the League in session the good causes they had at heart. The Women's International League was there, and the Esperanto League, and the Non-Alcoholic Drink Society, and the Mormons, and the Y.M.C.A. and the Union of Free Churches, and the Unprotected Armenians, and the Catholic Association, and the Orthodox Church Union, and the Ethical Society, and the Bolshevik Refugees (for it was in Russia, at the moment, the turn of the other side), and the Save the Children Committee, and the Freemasons, and the Constructive Birth

Control Society, and the Feathered Friends Protection Society, and the Negro Equality League, and the Anti-Divorce Union, and the Humanitarian Society, and the Eugenic Society, and the Orangemen's Union, and the Sinn Feiners, and the Zionists, and the Saloon Restoration League, and the S.P.G. And hundreds of Unprotected Minorities, irresistibly (or so they hoped) moving in their appeals.

Many of the representatives of these eager sections of humanity walked on the Quai du Mont Blanc on this fine Sunday afternoon and listened to the band, and buttonholed delegates and their secretaries, and chatted, and spat. The Czecho-Slovakians spat hardest, the Costa-Ricans loudest, the Unprotected Armenians most frequently, and the Serb-Croat-Slovenes most accurately, but the Assyrio-Chaldeans spat farthest. The Zionists did not walk on the Quai. They were holding meetings together and drawing up hundreds of petitions, so that the Assembly might receive at least one an hour from to-morrow onwards. Zionists do these things thoroughly.

Motor-cars hummed to and fro between the hotels and the Secretariat, and inside them one saw delegates. Flags flew and music played, and the *jet d'eau* sprang, an immense crystalline tree of life, a snowy angel, up from the azure lake into the azure heavens.

Henry gave a little sigh of pleasure. He liked the scene.

"Will there be treats?" he asked his companion. "I like treats."

"Treats? Who for? The delegates get treats all right, if you mean that."

"For us, I meant."

"Oh, yes, the correspondents get a free trip or a free feed now and then too. I usually get out of them myself; official beanos bore me. The town's very good to us; it wants the support of the press against rival claimants, such as Brussels."

"I should enjoy a lake trip very much," said Henry, beginning to feel that it was good to be there.

"Well, don't forget to hand in your address then, so that it gets on the list."

Henry was damped. 24 Allée Petit Chat,

Saint Gervais—it sounded rotten, and would sound worse still to the Genevan syndics, who knew just where it was and what, and were even now engaged in plans for pulling down and rebuilding all the old wharfside quarter. No; he could not hand in that address. . . .

"I suppose you've got to crab the show, whatever it does, haven't you," said the *Daily Sale* man presently. "Now I'm out to pat it on the back—this year. I like that better. It's dull being disagreeable all the time; so obvious, too."

"My paper *is* obvious," Henry owned gloomily. "Truth always is. You can't get round that."

"Oh, well, come," the other journalist couldn't stand that—"it's a bit thick for one of your lot to start talking about truth. The lies you tell daily—they have ours beat to a frazzle. Why, you couldn't give a straight account of a bus accident!"

"We could not. That is to say, we would not," Henry admitted. "But we lie about points of fact because our principles are true. They're so true that everything has

to be made to square with them. If you notice, our principles affect *all* our facts. Yours don't, quite all. You'd report the bus accident from pure love of sensation. We, in reporting it, would prove that it happened because buses aren't nationalised, or because the driver was underpaid, or the fares too high, or because coal has gone up more than wages, or something true of that sort. We waste nothing; we use all that happens. We're propagandists all the time, you're only propagandists part of the time; and commercialists the rest."

"Oh, certainly no one would accuse you of being commercialists," agreed the *Sale* man kindly. "Hallo, what's up?"

Henry had stiffened suddenly, and sat straight and rigid, like a dog who dislikes another dog. His companion followed his tense gaze, and saw a very neat, agreeable-looking and gentlemanly fellow, exquisitely cleaned, shaved, and what novelists call *groomed* (one supposes this to be a kind of rubbing-down process, to make the skin glossy), with gray spats, a malacca cane, and a refined gray suit with a faint stripe and

creases like knife-blades. This gentleman was strolling by in company with the senior British delegate, who had what foreigners considered a curious and morbid fad for walking rather than driving, even for short distances.

"Which troubles you?" inquired the representative of the *Daily Sale*. "Our only Lord B., or that Secretariat fellow?"

"That Secretariat fellow," Henry replied rather faintly.

The other put on his glasses, the better to observe the neat, supercilious figure. He laughed a little.

"Charles Wilbraham. Our Gilbert. The perfect knut. The type that does us credit abroad. Makes up for the seedy delegates and journalists, what? . . . He is said to have immense and offensive private wealth. In fact, it is obvious that he could scarcely present that unobtrusively opulent appearance on his official salary. They don't really get much, you know, poor fellows; not for an expensive place like this. . . . The queer thing is that no one seems to know where Wilbraham gets his money from; he never says. A very close, discreet

chap; a regular civil servant. Do you know him, then?"

Henry hesitated for a moment, appearing to think. He then replied, in the pained and reserved tone in which Mr. Wickham might have commented upon Mr. Darcy, "Slightly. Very slightly. As well as I wish. In fact, rather better. He wouldn't remember me. But I'll tell you one thing. But for a series of trivial circumstances, I too might have been . . . oh, well, never mind. Not, of course, that for any consideration I would serve in this ludicrous and impotent machine set up by the corrupt states of the world. Wilbraham can: I could not. My soul, at least, is my own."

"Oh, come," remonstrated the other journalist. "Come, come. Surely not. . . . But I must go and look up a few people. See you later on."

Henry remained for a minute, broodingly watching the neat receding back of Charles Wilbraham. How happy and how proud it looked, that serene and elegant back! How proud and how pleased Henry knew Charles Wilbraham to be, walking with the senior

British delegate, whom every one admired, along the Quai du Mont Blanc! As proud and as happy as a prince. Henry knew better than most others Charles Wilbraham's profound capacity for proud and princely pleasure. He loved these assemblies of important persons; loved to walk and talk with the great. He had, ever since the armistice, contracted a habit of being present at those happy little gatherings which had been, so far, a periodic feature of the great peace, and showed as yet no signs of abating. To Paris Charles Wilbraham had gone in 1919 (and how near Henry had been to doing the same; how near, and yet how far!). To San Remo he had been, to Barcelona and to Brussels; to Spa, to Genoa, even to Venice in the autumn of 1922. Besides all the League of Nations Assemblies. Where the eagles were gathered together, there, always, would Charles Wilbraham be.

Henry winced at the thought of Charles's so great happiness. But let him wait; only let Charles wait.

"Holy Mother of God!" (for Henry was a Roman Catholic), "only let him wait!"

4

The Assembly Hall was, as seen from the Press Gallery, a study in black and white. White sheets of paper laid on the desks, black coats, white or black heads.

Young and old, black and white, the delegates stood and walked about the hall, waiting for the session of the League of Nations Assembly to begin. The hum of talk rose up and filled the hall; it was as if a swarm of bees were hiving. What a very great deal, thought Henry, had the human race to say, always! Only the little Japs at the back sat in silent rows, scores and scores of them (for Japanese are no use by ones), immobile, impassive, with their strange little masks and slanting eyes, waiting patiently for the business of the day to begin. When it began, their reporters would take down everything that was said, writing widdershins, very diligently, very slowly, in their solemn picture language. There was something a little sinister, a little macabre, a little Grand Guignolish about

the grave, polite, mysterious little Japs. The Yellow Peril. Perilous because of their immense waiting patience, that would, in the end, tire the restless Western peoples out. How they stored their energy, sitting quiet in rows, and how the Westerners expended theirs! What conversations, what gesticulations, what laughter filled the hall! The delegates greeting one another, shaking one another by the hand, making their alliances and friendships for the session, arranging meals together, kindly, good-humoured, and polite, the best of friends in private for all their bitter and wordy squabbles in public. The chief Russian delegate, M. Kratzky, a small, trim little ex-Bolshevik, turned Monarchist by the recent *coup d'état*, was engaged in a genial conversation with the second French delegate. France had loudly and firmly voted last year against the admission of Russia to the League, but when the *coup d'état* restored the Monarchist Government (a government no less, if no more, corrupt than the Bolshevik rule which had preceded it, but more acceptable to Europe in general), France held out to her old ally

fraternal arms. The only delegates who cut the Russians were the Germans, and among the several delegates who cut the Germans were the Russians, for, as new members, these delegates were jealous one of the other. The Turkish delegates, also recently admitted, were meanwhile delightful to the Armenians, as if to prove how they loved these unhappy people, and how small was the truth of the tales that were told concerning their home life together. The two Irish delegates, O'Shane from the Free State and Macdermott from Ulster, were personally great friends, though they did not get on well together on platforms, as both kept getting and reading aloud telegrams from Ireland about crimes committed there by the other's political associates. This business of getting telegrams happens all the time to delegates, and is a cause of a good deal of disagreeableness.

On this, the first morning of the Assembly, telegrams shot in in a regular barrage, and nearly every delegate stopped several. Many came from America. The trouble about America was that every nation in the League

had compatriots there, American by citizenship, but something else by birth and sympathy, so that the Ukrainian congregation of Woodlands, Pa., would telegraph to request the League to save their relations in Ukraine from the atrocities of the Poles, and the Polish settlement in Milwaukee would wire and entreat that their sisters and their cousins and their aunts might be delivered from the marauding Ukrainians, and Baptist congregations in the Middle West wired to the Roumanian delegation to bring up before the Assembly the persecution of Roumanian Baptists. And the Albanian delegate (a benign bishop) had telegrams daily from Albania about the violation of Albanian frontiers by the Serbs, and the Serbian delegate had even more telegrams about the invasions and depredations of the Albanians. And the German and Polish delegates had telegrams from Silesia, and the Central and South American delegates had telegrams about troubles with neighbouring republics. And the Armenians had desperate messages from home about the Turks, for the Turks, despite the assignment to Armenia of a

national home, followed them there with instruments of torture and of death, making bonfires of the adults, tossing the infants on pikes, and behaving in the manner customarily adopted by these people towards neighbours. There is this about Armenians; every one who lives near them feels he must assault and injure them. There is this about Turks: they feel they must assault and injure any one who lives near them. So that the contiguity of Turks and Armenians has been even more unfortunate than are most contiguities. Neither of these nations ought to be near any other, least of all each other.

Meanwhile the Negro Equality League wired, "Do not forget the coloured races," and the Constructive Birth Control Society urged, "Make the world safe from babies" (this, anyhow, was the possibly inaccurate form in which this telegram arrived), and the Blackpool Methodist Union said, "The Lord be with your efforts after a World Peace, watched by all Methodists with hope, faith and prayer," and the Blue Cross Society said, "Remember our dumb friends," and Guatemala (which was not

there) telegraphed, "Do not believe a word uttered by the delegate from Nicaragua, who is highly unreliable." As for the Bolshevik refugees, they sent messages about the Russian delegation which were couched in language too unbalanced to be made public either in the Assembly Journal or in these pages, but they would be put in the Secretariat Library for people to read quietly by themselves. This also occurred to a telegram from the Non-Co-operatives of India, who wired with reference to the freedom of their country from British rule, a topic unsuited to discussion from a world platform.

All this fusillade of telegrams made but small impression on the recipients, who found in them nothing new. As one of the British delegates regretfully observed, "*Denique nullum est jam dictum quod non sit dictum prius.*"

But one telegram there was, addressed to the acting-President of the League, and handed in to him in the hall before the session began, which aroused some interest. It remarked, tersely and scripturally, in the

English tongue, "I went by and lo he was not." It had been despatched from Geneva, and was unsigned.

"And who," said the acting-President meditatively to those round him (he was an acute, courteous, and gentle Chinaman), "is this Lo? It is a name" (for so, indeed, it seemed to him), "but it is not my name. Does the sender, all the same, refer to the undoubted fact that I, who shall open this Assembly as its President, shall, after the first day's session, retire in favour of the newly elected President? Is it, perhaps, a taunt from some one who wishes to remind me of the transience of my office? Possibly from some gentleman of Japan . . . or America . . . who knows? or does it, perhaps, refer not to myself, but to some other person or persons, system or systems, who will, so the sender foresees, have their day and cease to be?" The acting-President was a scholar, and well read in English poetry. But, as his knowledge did not extend to the English translation of the Hebrew Psalms, he added, "It reads, this wire, like a quotation from literature?"

One of the British delegates gave him its source and explained that, in this context, "lo" was less a name than an ejaculation, and would probably, but for the limitations of the telegraphic code, have had after it a point of exclamation. "The telegram," added the British delegate, who was something of a biblical student, "seems to be a combination of the Bible and Prayer Book translations of the verse in question. The Revised Version of the Bible has again another translation, a rather unhappy compromise. I believe the correct rendering——"

"It is sarcasm," interrupted a French Secretariat official, "*C'est l'ironie.* The sender means that we are of so little use that in his eyes we don't exist. *C'est tout.* We're used to these gibes."

"I expect it means," said another member of the Secretariat hopefully (he was sick of Geneva), "that the fellow thinks the League will soon be moved to Brussels."

"Is Maxse visiting Geneva by any chance?" inquired one of the delegates from Central Africa. "It has rather his

touch. But then Maxse would always sign his name. He's unashamed. . . . I dare say this is merely some religious maniac reminding us that *sic transit gloria mundi.* Very likely a Jew. . . . Look, I have a much better one than that from the Non-Alcoholics. . . ."

So they proceeded in their leisurely, attached, and pleasant way to discuss these outpourings from eager human hearts all over the globe.

But the second French delegate, after brooding a while, said suddenly, " Ce télégramme là, celui qui dit ' j'ai traversé par là, et voici, il est biffé! ' les Boches l'ont expédié. Oui, justement. Tous les Boches veulent détruire la Société des Nations ; ils le désirent d'autant plus depuis que l'Allemagne est admise dans la Société des Nations. C'est une chose tout à fait certaine."

The French would talk like that about the Germans : you could not stop them. They had not, and possibly never would have, what is called a League mind. Central Africa, who had remonstrated gently but to no effect, pointing out that Germans

would probably not be acquainted with the English version of the Psalms, either Prayer Book or Bible. To prevent international emotion from running high, the acting-President caused the bell to be rung and the Assembly to be summoned to their seats.

5

So here, thought Henry of the *British Bolshevist*, was this great world federation in session. He could not help being excited, for he was naturally excitable, and it was his first (and, had he known it, his last) Assembly. He was annoyed by the noisy moving and chattering of the people behind him in the gallery, which prevented his hearing the opening speech so well as he otherwise would have done. Foreigners—how noisy they were! They were for ever passing to and fro, shaking hands with one another, exchanging vivacious comments. Young French widows, in their heavy crape, gayest, most resigned, most elegant of creatures, tripped by on their pin-like heels, sweetly

smiling their patient smiles. How different from young British widows, who, from their dress, might just as well have only lost a parent or brother. All widows are wonderful: Henry knew this, for always he had heard "Dear so-and-so is being simply wonderful" said of bereaved wives, and knew that it merely and in point of fact meant bereaved; but French widows are widows indeed. However, Henry wished they would sit still.

Henry was at the end of a row of English journalists. On his right, across a little gangway, were Germans. "At close quarters," reflected Henry, "one is not attracted by this unfortunate nation. It lacks—or is it rather that it has—a *je ne sais quoi*. . . . It is perhaps more favourably viewed from a distance: but even so not really favourably. Possibly, like many other nations, it is seen to greatest advantage at home. I must visit Germany." For Henry was anxious to acquire a broad, wise, unbiased international mind.

The acting-President was speaking, in his charming and faultless English. He was

saying what a great deal the League had done since the preceding Assembly. It did indeed seem, as he lightly touched on it, a very great deal. It had grappled with disease and drugs, economics, sanitation, prostitution, and education; it had through its Court of Justice arbitrated several times in international disputes and averted several wars; other wars it had deplored; it had wrestled with unemployment and even with disarmament . . . ("not, perhaps, quite happily put," murmured one British delegate to another). It had had great tasks entrusted to it and had performed them with success. It hoped to have, in the future, greater tasks yet; . . . it had admitted to membership several new nations, to whom it had extended the heartiest fraternal welcome; . . . above all it had survived in the face of all its enemies and detractors. . . . This present session was faced with a large and important programme. But before getting on to it there must be elections, votings, committees, a new President, and so forth.

The speaker sat down amid the applause

proper to the occasion, and the interpreter rose to translate him into French.

An elderly English clergyman behind Henry tapped his shoulder with a pencil and said, "What paper do you represent? I am reporting for the *Challenge*. The Churches have not taken enough interest in the League. One must stir them up. I preach about nothing else, in these days. The Church of England is sadly apathetic."

"It is a fault churches have," said Henry. "All the same, the Pope has telegraphed a blessing."

Those who would fain follow the French interpreter hushed them. Henry leant over, and watched Latin America conferring among itself, looking excited and full of purpose. Latin America obviously had something on its mind.

"What interests them so much?" he wondered aloud, and the journalist next him enlightened him.

"They've made up their minds to have a Latin American President again. They say they make a third of the Assembly, and

it's disgraceful that they don't have one every year. They don't want Edwardes again ; they want one who'll let the Spanish-Americans get on their legs every few minutes. Edwardes had lived abroad too long and was too cosmopolitan for them. They're going to put up a really suitable candidate this time, and jolly well see he gets it. He won't, of course. But there may be the hell of a row."

"That will be very amusing," said Henry hopefully.

They were taking the votes of the delegates for the committee on the credentials of delegates. Suppose, thought Henry, that in that hall there were one or more delegates whose credentials were impeachable; delegates, perhaps who had come here by ruse with forged authority, or by force, having stolen the credentials from the rightful owner. . . . It might be done: it surely could be done, by some unprincipled adventurer from a far country. Perhaps it had been done, and perhaps the committee would never be the wiser. Or perhaps there would be a public *exposé*. . . . That would be

interesting. Public *exposés* were always interesting. Henry's drifting glance strayed to the platform, where the Secretariat staff sat, or went in and out through the folding door. There, standing by the door and watching the animated scene, was Charles Wilbraham, composed, pleased, serene, looking like a theatrical producer on the first night of a well-staged play.

Yes, public *exposés* were interesting. . . .

The committee was elected and the Assembly dispersed for lunch, over which they would occupy themselves in lobbying for the Presidential election in the afternoon. Henry saw Charles Wilbraham go out in company with one of the delegates from Central Africa. No doubt but that the fellow had arranged to be seen lunching with this mainstay of the League. To lunch with the important . . . that should be the daily goal of those for whom life is not a playground but a ladder. It was Charles Wilbraham's daily goal: Henry remembered that from old days.

6

At the afternoon session the Assembly voted for a President and six Vice-Presidents. It took a long time, and considerable feeling was involved. Five candidates were proposed: Roumania suggested a French delegate, Great Britain an Albanian bishop, Japan the senior British delegate, Central Africa an eminent Norwegian explorer, and the Latin Americans put up, between them, three of their own race. Owing to unfortunate temporary differences between various of these small republics they could not all agree on one candidate.

After what seemed to Henry, unversed in these matters, a great deal of unnecessary voting on the part of the Assembly and of the Council, it was announced that the delegate for Norway, Dr. Svensen, was elected President. Amid cheers from those delegates who were pleased, from those who had self-control enough to conceal their vexation, and from the public in the galleries (for Dr. Svensen was the most widely

popular figure in the Assembly), the new President took his place and made the appropriate speech, in his sonorous English. Many in the hall were bored, some because the new President was known to be in with the English, who are not always liked by other nations; some because he spoke English readily and French ill, and most of them understood French readily and English not at all; others because he was of the party which was bent on carrying out certain measures in Europe for which they saw no necessity.

However, Dr. Svensen, a brief person and no word-waster, did not detain his audience long. At six o'clock the Assembly adjourned.

7

Henry despatched a short scornful story of the proceedings to his newspaper (which would not, he knew, print a long or effusive one), and dined with another English journalist in a café in the old *cité*. The other journalist, Grattan, came from Paris, and was bored with the League and with

Geneva. He preferred to report crime and blood, something, as he said, with guts in it. Statesmen assembled together made him yawn. For his part, he wished something would happen during the Assembly worth writing home about—some *crime passionnel*, some blood and thunder melodrama. "Perhaps," said Henry, hopefully, "it will."

"Well, it may. All these hot-blooded Latins and Slavs herded together ought to be able to produce something. . . . I bet you the Spanish Americans are hatching something to-night over there. . . ." He waved his hand in the direction of the other side of the lake, where the great hotels blazed their thousand windows into the night. Behind those windows burnt who knew what of passion and of plot?

8

Dr. Svensen, strolling at a late hour across the Pont du Mont Blanc (he was returning from dinner at the Beau Rivage to his own hotel), was disturbed by a whimpering

noise behind him, like the mewing of a little cat. Turning round, he saw a small and ragged form padding barefoot after him, its knuckles in its eyes. The Norwegian explorer, unlike most great men, was tender-hearted to children. Bending down to the crying urchin, he inquired of it the cause of its trouble. Its answer was in Russian, and to the effect that it was very hungry. Dr. Svensen softened yet more. A hungry Russian child! That was an object of pity which he never could resist. Russia was full of them; this one was probably an exiled Bolshevik. He felt in his pockets for coins, but the hungry Russian infant tugged at his coat. "Come," it said, and Dr. Svensen gathered from it that there were yet more hungry Russians where this came from. He followed. . . .

9

The morning session of the Assembly was supposed to begin at ten, and at this hour next morning the unsophisticated Henry

Beechtree took his seat in the Press Gallery. He soon perceived his mistake. The show obviously was not going to begin for ages. No self-respecting delegate or journalist would come into the hall on the stroke of the hour. The superior thing, in this as in other departments of life, was to be late. Lateness showed that serene contempt for the illusion we call time which is so necessary to ensure the respect of others and oneself. Only the servile are punctual. . . .

But "Nothing to swank about in being late," thought Henry morosely; "only means they've spent too long over their coffee and bread and honey, the gluttons. I could have done the same myself."

Indeed, he wished that he had, for he fell again into the hands of the elderly clergyman who had addressed him yesterday, and who was, of course, punctual too.

"I see," said the clergyman, "that you have one of the French comic papers with you. A pity their humour is so much spoilt by suggestiveness."

Suggestiveness. Henry could never understand that word as applied in condemnation.

Should not everything be suggestive? Or should all literature, art, and humour be a cul-de-sac, suggesting no idea whatsoever? Henry did not want to be uncharitable, but he could not but think that those who used this word in this sense laid themselves open to the suspicion (in this case, at least, quite unjustified), that their minds were only receptive of one kind of suggestion, and that a coarse one.

"I expect," he replied, "that you mean coarseness. People often do when they use that word, I notice. Anyhow, the papers are not very funny, I find."

"Suggestiveness," said the clergyman, "is seldom amusing."

Before Henry had time to argue again about this word, he hurried on.

"I sent yesterday a long message to the *Church Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Commonwealth*, and the *Challenge* about the first meeting. It is most important that these papers should set before their readers the part that the Church ought to play in promoting international goodwill."

"Indeed," said Henry, who did not see

Anglican journals. He added vaguely, "The Pope sent a telegram. . . ." For when people spoke to him of Church life, he said "the Pope" mechanically; it was his natural reaction to the subject.

"You interest me," said the English clergyman. "For the second time you have mentioned the Pope to me. Are you, perhaps, a Roman Catholic?"

"I suppose," Henry absently agreed, "that is what you would call it."

"We do, you know," the clergyman apologised. "Forgive me if it seems discourteous. . . . You know, then, of course, who that is, opposite?"

Henry looked across the hall to the opposite gallery, and perceived that his companion was referring to a small, delicate-looking elderly man, with the face of a priest and the clothes of a layman, who had just taken his seat there.

"I do not indeed."

"He is the ex-cardinal Franchi. You know him by reputation, of course."

"Wasn't he suspended for heresy? I have, I think, seen some of his books."

"He is a great scholar and a delightful writer. No one has gone more deeply into mediæval Church history and modern theological criticism. So I am told, but I have not read him myself, as he prefers to write in Italian, though he has a perfect command of several other tongues."

"Nor I, as I am not very much interested in Church history or theological criticism. Besides, his writings are, I suppose, heretical."

"I don't know as to that; I am no judge. But he was, I believe, as you say, retired for heresy. And now he lives in the most delightful of mediæval châteaux at Monet, a little village up the lake. I have been to see him there. If I may, I will introduce you. He enjoys making the acquaintance of his co-religionists. In this Calvinistic part of the world the educated classes are nearly all Protestants. The ex-cardinal does not care for Protestants; he finds them parvenus and bourgeois. He is a delightfully courteous host, however, even to those, and a wonderful talker. And his heart is in the League. A wit, a scholar, an aristocrat, a *bon-viveur*,

and a philanthropist. If your Church retains many priests as good as those she expels, she is to be congratulated."

"She is," Henry agreed. "She can afford to fling out one or two by the way. Yes; I would like to know him, the ex-cardinal; he looks witty and shrewd, and at the same time an idealist. . . . But how late they are in beginning. My watch is seldom right, but I imagine it must be after ten-thirty.

The young man Grattan, with whom Henry had dined last night, lounged in, with his cynical smile.

"You're very young and innocent, Beech-tree. I suppose you've been here since ten. It's just on eleven now. The President's not to hand and no one seems to know where he is. Oh, well, it's not his fault; people spoil him. His head's turned, poor Svensen. I expect he made a night of it and is lying in this morning. I don't blame him. We don't need a President. But there seems to be some unrest among the Secretariat."

This seemed, indeed, to be so. The

members of this body, standing about the hall and platform, were animated and perturbed; the more irresponsible juniors seemed amused, others anxious. The Secretary-General was talking gravely to another high official.

The correspondent of the *Daily Insurance*, who had been talking in the hall to the delegates and Secretariat, watched by Henry from above with some envy, at this point entered the Press Gallery, edged his way to his seat, picked up the papers he had deposited there earlier, and made rapidly for the exit.

"Got a story already?" Grattan said to him.

"No, but there may be one any moment. They've sent round to the Metropole, and Svensen didn't sleep in his bed. He never came in last night after dinner."

He was off. Grattan whistled, and looked more cheerful.

"That's good enough. That's a story in itself. Didn't sleep in his bed. That's a headline all right. Good old Svensen. Here, I'm going down to hear more. Mustn't let

Jefferson get ahead of us. Come along, Beechtree, and nose things out. This will be nuts for our readers. Even your crabbed paper will have to give a column to Svensen Not Sleeping in his Bed. Can't you see all the little eyes lighting up?"

He rushed away, and Henry followed. Meanwhile the bell was rung and MM. les Délégués took their seats. The deputy-President, the delegate for Belgium, took the chair. The President, he announced, was unfortunately not yet in attendance. Pending his arrival, the Assembly would, since time pressed, proceed with the order of the day, which was the election of committees. . . . The Assembly, always ready to vote, began to do so. It would keep them busy for some time.

10

Meanwhile Henry stood about in the lobby, where a greater excitement and buzz of talk than usual went on. Where was Dr. Svensen? The other members of the

Norwegian delegation could throw no light on the question. He had dined last night at the Beau Rivage, with the British delegation; he had left that hotel soon after eleven, on foot; he had meant, presumably, to walk back to the Metropole, which stood behind the Jardin Anglais, on the Mont Blanc side. The hall porter at the Metropole asserted that he had never returned there. The Norwegian delegation, not seeing him in the morning, had presumed that he had gone out early; but now the hotel staff declared that he had not spent the night in the hotel.

"He probably thought he would go for a long walk; the night was fine," Jefferson, who knew his habits, suggested. "Or for a row up the lake. The sort of thing Svensen *would* do."

"In that case he's drowned," said Grattan, who was of a forthright manner of speech. "He's a business-like fellow, Svensen. He'd have turned up in time for the show if he could, even after a night out."

The next thing was to inquire of the boat-keepers, and messengers were despatched to do this.

"I am afraid it looks rather serious," remarked a soft, grave, important voice behind Henry's back. "I am pretty intimate with Svensen; I was lunching with him only yesterday, as it happens. He didn't say a word then of any plan for a night expedition. I am afraid it looks sadly like an accident of some sort."

"Perspicacious fellow," muttered Jefferson, who did not like Charles Wilbraham.

Henry edged away: neither did he like Charles Wilbraham. He did not even turn his face towards him.

He jostled into his friend the English clergyman, who said, "Ah, Mr. Beechtree. I want to introduce you to Dr. Franchi." He led Henry by the arm to the corner where the alert-looking ex-cardinal stood, talking with the Spaniard whom Henry had noticed in the lift at the Secretariat buildings.

"Mr. Beechtree, Your Eminence," said the Reverend Cyril Waring, who chose by the use of this title to show at once his respect for the ex-cardinal, his contempt for the bigotry which had unfrocked him, and his

disgust at the scandalous tongues which whispered that the reason for his unfrocking had been less heresy than the possession of a wife, or even wives. If Canon Waring had heard these spiteful *on-dits*, he paid no attention to them; he was a high-minded enthusiast, and knew a gentleman and a scholar when he saw one.

"The correspondent of the *British Bolshevist*," he added, "and a co-religionist of Your Eminence's."

The ex-cardinal gave Henry his delicate hand, and a shrewd and agreeable smile.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Beechtree. You must come and see me one day, if you will, at my lake villa. It is a pleasant expedition, and a beautiful spot."

He spoke excellent English with a slight accent. A thousand pities, thought Henry, that such a delightful person should be a heretic—such a heretic as to have been unfrocked. Why, indeed, should any one be a heretic? Atheism was natural enough, but heresy seemed strange. For, surely, if one could believe anything, one could believe

everything. For his part, he believed everything. . . .

Nevertheless, he accepted the invitation with pleasure. It would be a trip, and Henry loved trips, particularly up lakes.

Dr. Franchi, observing the young journalist with approbation, liking his sensitive and polite face, saw it grow suddenly sullen, even spiteful, at the sound of a voice raised in conversation not far from him.

"Perhaps you will do me the honour of lunching with me, M. Kratzky. I have a little party coming, including Suliman Bey. . . ."

M. Kratzky was, in his way, the most deeply and profusely blood-stained of Russians. One of the restored Monarchist government, he it was who had organised and converted the Tche-ka to Monarchist use, till they became in his hands an instrument of perfect and deadly efficiency, sparing neither age, infancy, nor ill-health. M. Kratzky had devised a system of espionage so thorough, of penalties so drastic, that few indeed were safe from torture, confinement,

or death, and most experienced all three. One would scarcely say that the White tyranny was worse than the Red had been, or worse than the White before that (one would indeed scarcely say that any Russian government was appreciably worse than any other); but it was to the full as bad, and Kratzky (the Butcher of Odessa, as his nickname was), was its chief tyrant. And here was Charles Wilbraham taking the butcher's blood-stained hand and asking him to lunch. What Mr. Wickham Steed used to feel of those who asked the Bolsheviks to lunch at Genoa in April, 1922, Henry now felt of Charles Wilbraham, only more so. And Suliman Bey too . . . a ghastly Turk; for Turks (whatever you might think of Russians) *were* ghastly; the very thought of them, for all their agreeable manners, turned Henry, who was squeamish about physical cruelty, sick. God, what a lunch party!

"You know our friend Mr. Wilbraham, I expect," said Dr. Franchi.

"Scarcely," said Henry. "He wouldn't know me."

"A very efficient young man. He has that air."

"He has. But not really very clever, you know. It's largely put on. . . . I'm told. He likes to *seem* to know everything . . . so I've heard."

"A common peccadillo." The ex-cardinal waved it aside with a large and tolerant gesture. "But we do not, most of us, succeed in it."

"Oh, Wilbraham doesn't succeed. Indeed no. Most people see at once that he is just a solemn ass. That face, you know . . . like a mushroom. . . ."

"Ah, that is a Bernard Shaw phrase. A bad play, that, but excellent dialogue. . . . But he is good-looking, Mr. Wilbraham."

Henry moodily supposed that he was. "In a sort of smug, cold way," he admitted.

"E cosa fa tra questo bel giovanotto e quel Charles Wilbraham?" wondered the ex-cardinal, within himself.

II

Henry left the Salle de la Reformation and went out into the town to look for further light on the mystery. How proud he would be if he should collect more information about it than the other journalists! Than Jefferson, for instance, who was always ahead in these things, interviewing statesmen, getting statements made to him. . . . No one made statements to Henry; he never liked to ask for them. But he was, he flattered himself, as good as any one else at nosing out news stories, mysteries, and so forth.

Musing deeply, he walked to the ice-cream café, close to the Assembly Hall. There he ordered an ice of mixed framboise, pistachio, and coffee, and some iced raspberry syrup, and sat outside under the awning, slowly enjoying the ice, sucking the syrup through straws, and thinking. He always thought best while eating well too; with him, as with many others, high living and high thinking went together, or

would have, only lack of the necessary financial and cerebral means precluded much practice of either.

While yet in the middle of the raspberry syrup he suddenly lifted his mouth from the straws, ejaculated softly, and laughed.

"It is a possibility," he muttered. "A possibility, worth following up. . . . Odder things have happened . . . are happening, all the time. . . . In fact, this is not at all an odd thing. . . ." Decisively he rapped on the table for his bill, paid for his meal, and rose to go, not forgetting first to finish his raspberry syrup.

He walked briskly along the side of the lake to the Molard jetty, where he found a *mouette* in act to start for the other side. How he loved these *mouette* rides, the quick rush through blue water, half Geneva on either side, and the narrow shave under the Pont du Mont Blanc. He was always afraid that one day they would not quite manage it, but would hit the bridge; it was a fear of which he could not get rid. He always held his breath as they rushed under the bridge, and let it out in relief as they emerged

safely beyond it. How cheap it was: a lake trip for fifteen centimes! Henry was sorry when they reached the other side. He walked thoughtfully up from the landing stage to the Secretariat, where he ascended to the room of Mr. Wilbraham. Mr. Wilbraham was not, of course, there; he was over at the Assembly Hall. But his secretary was there; a cheerful young lady typing letters with extraordinary efficiency and rapidity.

"Oh," said Henry, "I'm sorry. I thought Mr. Wilbraham might possibly be here."

"No," said the young lady agreeably. "He is over at the Assembly. Will you leave a message?"

Henry laid his hat and cane on a table, and strode about the room. A large pleasant room it was, with a good carpet; the kind of room that Charles Wilbraham would have, and always did have.

"No. No, I'll look in again. Or I'll see him over there this afternoon." He looked at his watch. "Lunch time. How quickly the morning has gone. It always does; don't you find that? And more so

than usual when it's an exciting morning like this."

"It is exciting, isn't it. Have they found him yet? I do admire him, don't you?"

"Completely. No, they haven't found him. Mr. Wilbraham says it looks sadly like an accident of some sort."

She acknowledged his imitation of Mr. Wilbraham's voice with a smile.

"That would be tragic. Svensen, of all the delegates! One wouldn't mind most of them disappearing a bit. Some of them would be good riddances."

"Well," said Henry, changing the subject, "If we're both going out to lunch, can't we lunch together? I'm Beechtree, of the *British Bolshevist*."

Miss Doris Wembly looked at Beechtree, rather liked him, and said, "Right. But I must finish one letter first."

She proceeded with her efficient, rapid, and noisy labours. She did not need to look at the keyboard, she was like that type of knitter who knits the while she gazes into space; she had learnt "Now is the time for all good men to come to the help of the party."

Henry, strolling round the room, observing details, had time to speculate absently on the wonderful race of typists. He had in the past known many of them well, and felt towards them a regard untouched by glamour. How, he had often thought, they took life for granted, unquestioning, unwondering, accepting, busy eternally with labours they understood so little, performed so well, rattling out their fusillade of notes that formed words they knew not of, sentences that, uncomprehended, yet did not puzzle them or give them pause, on topics which they knew only as occasioning cascades of words. To them one word was the same, very nearly the same, as another of similar length; words had features, but no souls; did they fail to decipher the features of one of them, another of the same dimensions would do. And what commas they wielded, what colons, what semis, what stops! But efficient they were, all the same, for they were usually approximately right, and always incredibly quick. Henry knew that those stenographers who had been taken out to Geneva were, in the main, of a more sophisticated order, of

a higher intellectual equipment. But Charles Wilbraham's secretary was of the ingenuous type. Probably the more sophisticated would not stay with him. A pretty girl she was, with a round brown face, kind dark eyes, and a wide, sweet, and dimpling mouth. Henry, like every one else, liked a girl to be pretty, but, quite unlike most young men, he preferred her to be witty. The beauty of the dull bored him very soon; Henry had his eccentricities. He did not think that Miss Wembley was going to be amusing, but still, he intended to cultivate her acquaintance.

Henry looked at his watch. It was twelve forty-five. "Can't the rest wait?" he said.

"I'm just on dor e. It's a re-type I'm doing. I spelt parliament with a small p, and Mr. Wilbraham said he couldn't send it, not even if I rubbed it out with the eraser. He said it would show, and it was to the F.O., who are very particular."

"My God," Henry ejaculated, in a low yet violent tone, and gave a bitter laugh. His eyes gleamed fiercely. "I can imagine," he said, with restraint, "that

Mr. Wilbraham might be particular. He *looks* particular."

"Well, he is, rather. But he's quite right, I suppose. Messy letters look too awful. Some men will sign simply anything. I don't like that. . . . There, now I've done."

"Come along then," said Henry rapidly.

12

The Assembly met again at four o'clock, and proceeded under the Deputy President with the order of the day. But it was a half-hearted business. No one was really interested in anything except the fate of Dr. Svensen, who, it had transpired from inquiry among the boat-keepers, had not taken a boat on the lake last night.

"Foul play," said the journalist Grattan, hopefully. "Obviously foul play."

"Ask the Bolshevist refugees," the *Times* correspondent said with a shrug. For he had no opinion of these people, and believed

them to be engaged in a continuous plot against the peace of the world, in combination with the Germans. The *Morning Post* was inclined to agree, but held that O'Shane, the delegate from the Irish Free State, was in it too. Whenever any unpleasant incident occurred, at home or abroad (such as murders, robberies, bank failures, higher income tax, Balkan wars, strikes, troubles in Ireland, or cocaine orgies), the *Times* said, " Ask the Bolshevists and the Germans," and the *Morning Post* said, " Ask the Bolshevists and the Germans by all means, but more particularly ask Sinn Fein," just as the *Daily Herald* said, " Ask the capitalists and Scotland Yard," and some eminent *littérateurs*, " Ask the Jews." We must all have our whipping-boys, our criminal suspects; without them sin and disaster would be too tragically diffused for our comfort. Henry Beechtree's suspect was Charles Wilbraham. He knew that he suspected Charles Wilbraham too readily; Wilbraham could not conceivably have committed all the sins of which Henry was fain to believe him guilty. Henry knew this, and kept a guard

on his own over-readiness, lest it should betray him into rash accusation. Information; evidence; that was what he had to collect.

The question was, as an intelligent member of the Secretariat pointed out, who stood to benefit by the disappearance of Svensen from the scenes? Find the motive for a deed, and very shortly you will find the doer. Had Svensen a private enemy? No one knew. Many persons disapproved of the line he was apt to take in public affairs: he wanted to waste money on feeding hungry Russians ("No one is sorrier than my tender-hearted nation for starving persons," the other delegates would say, "but we have no money to send them, and are not Russians always hungry?") and was in an indecent hurry about disarmament, which should be a slow and patient process. ("No one is more anxious than my humane nation for peace," said the delegates, "but there is a dignified caution to be observed.") Yes; many persons disagreed with Svensen as to the management of the affairs of the world; but surely no one would make away

with him on that account. Far more likely did it seem that he had inadvertently stumbled into the lake, after dining well. What an end to so great and good a man!

13

Lord Burnley, the senior British delegate, that distinguished, notable, and engaging figure in the League, had, as has been said earlier, a strange addiction to walking. This afternoon, having parted from his friends outside the Assembly Hall, he started, as was a favourite pastime of his, to walk through the older and more picturesque streets of the city, for which he had a great taste.

As he strolled in his leisurely manner up the Rue de la Cité, stopping now and then to look at its antique and curious shops, he came to a book shop, whose outside shelf was stocked with miscellaneous literature. Lord Burnley, who could seldom pass an old bookshop without pausing, stopped to glance at the row of paper-backs, and was

caught by a familiar large bound book among them. Familiar indeed, for was it not one of his own works? He put on his glasses and looked closer. Yes: the volume was inscribed *Scepticism as a Basis for Faith*, by George Burnley. And printed on a paper label below the title, was the inscription, "Special Edition, recently annotated by the Author."

Strange! Lord Burnley was puzzled. For neither recently nor at any other time was he conscious of having issued a special annotated edition of this work.

For a minute or two he pondered, standing on the pavement. Then, deciding to inquire further into this thing, he stooped his head and shoulders and passed under the low lintel into the little dark shop.

14

Henry, having left the Assembly, sent off his message to his newspaper (it was entirely about the disappearance of Dr. Svensen), glanced into his pigeon-hole on his way out,

and found there, among various superfluous documents, a note addressed to him by the ex-cardinal Franchi, suggesting that, if he should not find himself better employed, he should give the writer his company at dinner at eight o'clock that evening, at his villa at Monet, two miles up the lake. He would find a small electric launch waiting for him at seven-thirty at the Eaux-Vives jetty, in which would be Dr. Franchi's niece, who had been attending the Assembly that afternoon.

"Excellent," thought Henry. "I will go." For he was greatly attracted by Dr. Franchi, and liked also to dine out, and to have a trip up to Monet in a motor launch.

He went back to his indigent rooms in the Allée Petit Chat, and washed and dressed. (Fortunately, he had at no time a heavy beard, so did not have to shave in the evenings.) Well-dressed he was not, even in his evening clothes, which were a cast-off of his brother's, and not, as evening clothes should be, faultless; but still they passed, and Henry always looked rather nice.

"Not a bad face," he reflected, surveying

it in the dusty speckled glass. "A trifle weak perhaps. I *am* a trifle weak; that is so. But, on the whole, the face of a gentleman and a decent fellow. And not devoid of intelligence. . . . Interesting, to see one's own face. Especially in this odd glass. Now I must be off. Hat, stick, overcoat, scarf—that is everything.

He walked down to the Eaux-Vives jetty, where a smart electric launch did indeed await him, and in it a young lady of handsome appearance, who regarded him with friendly interest and said, in pronounced American with an Italian accent, "I'm real pleased to meet you, Mr. Beechtree. Step right in. We'll start at once."

Henry stepped right in, and sat down by this prepossessing girl.

"I must introduce myself," she said. "My name is Gina Longfellow, and I'm Dr. Franchi's niece."

"What excellent English you talk," said Henry politely.

"American," she corrected him. "My father was a native of Joliet, Ill. Are you acquainted with the Middle West?"

"I've travelled there," said Henry, and repressed a shudder, for he had found the Middle West deplorable. He preferred South America.

"I am related to the poet," said Miss Longfellow. "That great poet who wrote *Hiawatha*, *Evangeline*, and *The Psalm of Life*. Possibly you came across him out in the States?"

"No," said Henry. "I fancy he was even then dead. You are a descendant of his?"

"A descendant—yes. I remember now; he died, poor nonno. . . . The lake pleases you, Mr. Beechtree?"

"Indeed, yes. It is very beautiful."

Miss Longfellow's fine dark eyes had a momentary flicker of resentment. Most young men looked at her, but Mr. Beechtree at the lake, with his melancholy brooding eyes. Henry liked handsome young women well enough, but he admired scenery more. The smooth shimmer of the twilight waters, still holding the flash of sunset, the twinkling city of lights they were swiftly leaving behind them at the lake's head, the smaller

constellations of the lakeside villages on either hand—these made on Henry, whose æsthetic nerve was sensitive, an unsteadying impression.

Miss Longfellow recalled his attention.

"Do you think the League will last?" she inquired sharply. "Do you like Geneva? Do you think the League will be moved somewhere else? Isn't it a real pity the French are so obstructionist? Will the Americans come in?"

Henry adjusted his monocle and looked at her in some surprise.

"Well," she said impatiently, "I guess you're used to those questions by now."

"But you've left out the latest," Henry said. "What do you think can have happened to Svensen?"

"Ah, there you have us all guessing," she amiably returned. "Poor Svensen. Who'd have thought it of him?"

"Thought what?"

"Why, this. He always seemed such a white man. My, isn't it queer what people will do?"

Henry, who had been brought up on Dr. Svensen's narrations of his Arctic explorations, and greatly revered him, said, "But I don't believe he's done anything."

"Not done a get-away, you mean? Well now, why should he, after all? Perhaps he fell right into this deep lake after dining, and couldn't get out, poveretto. Yet he was a real fine swimmer they say."

"Most improbable," said Henry, who had dismissed that hypothesis already. He leant forward and spoke discreetly. "I fancy, Miss Longfellow, there are those in Geneva who could throw some light on this affair if they chose."

"You don't say! Dio mio! Now isn't that quite a notion!" Miss Longfellow was interested. "Why, Mr. Beechtree, you don't suspect foul play, do you?"

Henry nodded.

"I suppose I rather easily suspect foul play," he candidly admitted. "It's more interesting, and I'm a journalist. But in this case there are reasons——"

"Now isn't this too terribly exciting! Reasons! Just you tell me all you know,

Mr. Beechtree, if it's not indiscreet. Non son' giornalista, io!"

"I don't *know* anything. Except that there are people who might be glad to get Svensen out of the way."

"But who are they? I thought every one respected him ever so!"

"Respect is akin to fear," said Henry.

On that dictum, the launch took a swift turn to the right, and dashed towards a jetty which bore on a board above it the words, "Château Léman. Defense."

"A private jetty," said Henry.

"Yes. The village jetty is beyond. This is my uncle's. That path only leads up to the Château."

They disembarked, and climbed up a steep path which led through a wrought iron gate into a walled garden that ran down to the lake's edge. Henry, who was romantic, said, "How very delightful. How old is the Château?"

"Chi sa? Real old, I can tell you. Ask Uncle Silvio. He's great on history. He's for ever writing historical books. History and heresy—Dio mio! That is why

they turned him out of the Church, you know."

"So I heard. . . . Are you a Catholic, Miss Longfellow?"

She gave a little shrug.

"I was brought up Catholic. Women believe what they are taught, as a rule, don't they?"

"I hadn't observed it," Henry said, "particularly. Are women so unlike men then?"

"That's quite a question, isn't it. What do you think?"

"I can't think in large sections and masses of people," Henry replied. "Women are so different one from another. So are men. That's all I can see, when people talk of the sexes."

"*Macchè!* You don't say!" said Miss Longfellow, looking at him inquiringly. "Most people always think in large masses of people. They find it easier, more convenient, more picturesque."

"It is indeed so," Henry admitted. "But less accurate. Accuracy—do you agree with me?—is of an importance very greatly underestimated by the majority of persons."

"I guess," said Miss Longfellow, not interested, "you're quite a clever young man."

Henry replied truthfully, "Indeed, no," and at this point they turned a bend in the path and the château was before them in the evening light; an arcaded, balconied, white-washed building, vine-covered and red-roofed, with queer outside staircases and green-shuttered windows, many of which were lit. Certainly old, though restored. A little way from it was a small belfried chapel.

"Charming," said Henry, removing his eyeglass the better to look. "Amazingly charming."

A big door stood open and through this they passed into a hall lit by large hanging lamps and full of dogs, or so it seemed to Henry, for on all sides they rose to stare at him, to sniff at his ankles, for the most part with the air of distaste commonly adopted towards Henry by these friends of man.

"You're not a dog lover?" Miss Longfellow suggested, and Henry again replied

that he could not like or dislike his fellows in large sections; some dogs he liked, others not, as with men, women, and children.

"But I guess they don't like you very much," she returned, shrewdly observing their manners to him. "Now isn't that cute, how they take to some people and not to others. They all love Uncle Silvio on sight. Stray dogs follow him in the road and won't leave him. Half these are strays. . . . . They know he likes them, that's what it is. Dogs always know, they say, don't they."

"Know what?" asked Henry, suspicious that she meant that dogs know a good character from a bad, which was what "they" ("they" meaning the great collection of noodles who constitute the public) do actually say. The things "they" say! They even say that children too (the most foolish of God's creatures) have this intuitive knowledge; they say that to drink hot tea makes you cooler, that it is more tiring going down-hill than up, that honesty is the best policy, that love makes the world go round, that "literally" bears the same

meaning as "metaphorically" ("she was literally a mother to him," they will say), that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, that those who say least feel most, that one must live. There is truly no limit to what "they," in their folly, will say. So Henry, wincing among the suspicious dogs, moodily, and not for the first time, reflected.

Miss Longfellow did not answer his inquiry, but stood in the hall and cried, "Zio!" in a voice like a May cuckoo's.

A door opened, and in a moment Dr. Franchi, small and frail and charming, came forward with a sweet smile and hand outstretched, through a throng of fawning, grinning dogs.

"A pleasure indeed, Mr. Beechtree."

"He is like Leo XIII.," was Henry's thought. "Strange, that he should be a heretic!"

15

They sat at dinner on a terrace, under hanging lamps, looking out at the lake

through vine-festooned arches. The moon rose, like the segment of an orange, sending a softly glowing path to them across black water. Here and there the prow lanterns of boats rosily gleamed. The rest was violet shadow.

How Henry, after his recent experiences of cheap cafés, again enjoyed eating a meal fit for a gentleman. Radiant silver, napery like snow (for, in the old fashion still in use on the continent, Dr. Franchi had a fair linen cloth spread over his dinner-table; there is no doubt but that this extravagant habit gives an old-world charm to a meal), food and wines of the most agreeable, conversation to the liking of all three talkers (which is, after all, the most that can be said of any conversation), one of the loveliest views in Europe, and gentle night air—Henry was indeed fortunate. How kind, he reflected, was this ex-cardinal, who, having met him but once, asked him to such a pleasant entertainment. Why was it? He must try to be worthy of it, to seem cultivated and agreeable and intelligent. But Henry knew that he was none

of these things; continually he had to be playing a part, trying to hide his folly under a pretence of being like other people, sensible and informed and amusing, whereas really he was more like an animal, interested in the foolish and fleeting impressions of the moment. He was not fit for a gentleman's dinner-table.

The conversation was of all manner of things. They spoke, of course, of the League.

"It has a great future," said Dr. Franchi, "by saying which I by no means wish to underrate its present."

"Rather capitalist in tendency, perhaps?" the correspondent of the *British Bolshevist* suggested. "A little too much in the hands of the major states?" But he did not really care.

"You misjudge it," Dr. Franchi said. "It is a very fair association of equal states. A true democracy: little brothers and great, hand in hand. Oh, it will do great things; is, indeed, doing great things now. One cannot afford to be cynical about such an attempt. Anything which encourages the

nations to take an interest in one another's concerns——"

"There has surely," said Henry, still rather apathetically voicing his paper, "always been too much of that already. Hence wars. Nations should keep themselves to themselves. International impertinence . . . it's a great evil. Live and let live."

"You don't then agree that we should attempt a world-cosmogony? That the nations should be as brothers, and concern themselves with one another's famines, one another's revolutions, one another's frontiers? But why this curious insistence on the nation as a unit? Why select nationality, rather than the ego, the family, the township, the province, the continent, the hemisphere, the planet, the solar system, or even the universe? Isn't it just a little arbitrary, this stress we lay on nationalism, patriotism, love of one particular country, of the territories united fortuitously under one particular government? What is a government, that we should regard it as a connecting link? What is a race, that queer, far-flung thing whose boundaries march with those of no

nation? And when we say we love a country, do we mean its soil, the people under its government, or the scattered peoples everywhere sharing some of the same blood and talking approximately the same tongue? What, in fact, is this *patriotism*, this love of country, that we all feel, and that we nearly all exalt as if it were a virtue? We don't praise egoism, or pride of family, or love of a particular town or province, in the same way. What magic is there in the ring that embraces a country, that we admire it as precious metal and call the other rings foolish or base? You will admit that it is a queer convention."

"All conventions are queer, I think," Henry said indifferently. "But there they are. One accepts them. It is less trouble."

"It makes more trouble in the end, my young friend. . . . I will tell you one thing from my heart. If the League of Nations should fail, should go to pieces, it will be from excess of this patriotism. Every country out for its own hand. That has always been the trouble with the world, since we were hordes of savages grouped in

tribes one against the other—as, indeed, we still are."

"Well, zio mio," said Miss Longfellow breezily, "if you don't look out for number one, no one else will, you may be dead sure. And *then* where are you? In the soup, sure thing. Nel zuppo!" She gave a gay, chiming, cuckooish laugh. A cheerful girl, thought Henry.

"Viva the League of Nations!" she cried, and drank brightly of her marsala.

Dr. Franchi, with an indulgent smile for youthful exuberance, drank too.

"The hope for the world," he said. "You don't drink this toast, Mr. Beech-tree?"

"My paper," said Henry, "believes that such hope for the world as there may be lies elsewhere."

"Ah, your paper. And you yourself?"

"I? I see no hope for the world. No hope, that is to say, that it will ever be an appreciably better world than it is at present. Before that occurs, I imagine that it will have broken its string, as it were, and dashed off into space, and so an end."

"And my hopes for it are two—an extension of country-love into world-love, and a purified version of the Christian faith."

"Purified. . . ." Henry recollected that Dr. Franchi was a modernist and a heretic. "A queer word," he mused. "I am not sure that I know what it means."

"Ah. You are orthodox Catholic, no doubt. You admit no possible impurities in the faith."

"I have never thought about it. I do not even know what an impurity is. One thing does not seem to me much more pure than another, and not much more odd. For my part, I accept the teaching of the Church wholesale. It seems simpler."

"Until you come to think about it," said the ex-cardinal. "Then it ceases to be simple, and becomes difficult and elaborate to a high degree. Too difficult for a simple soul like myself. For my part, I have been expelled from the bosom of my mother the Church, and am now, having completed immense replies to the decree Lamentabili Sane and to the encyclical Pascendi Gregis, writing a History of the Doctrine of

Transubstantiation. Does the topic interest you?"

"I am no theologian," said Henry. "And I have been told that if one inquires too closely into these mysteries, faith wilts. I should not like that. So I do not inquire. It is better so. I should not wish to be an atheist. I have known an atheist whom I have very greatly disliked."

The thought of this person shadowed his brow faintly with a scowl, not unobserved by his host and hostess. "But," he added, "he became a worse thing; he is now an atheist turned Catholic. . . ."

"There I am with you," the ex-cardinal agreed. "About the Catholic convert there is often a quite peculiar lack of distinction. . . . But we will not talk about these."

16

They were now eating fruit. Melon, apricots, pears, walnuts, figs, and fat purple grapes. The night ever deepened into a

greater loveliness. In the steep, sweet garden below the terrace nightingales sang.

"On such a night as this," said Dr. Franchi, cracking a walnut, "it is difficult to be an atheist."

"Why so?" asked Henry dreamily, biting a ripe black fig, and wishing that the ex-cardinal had not thought it necessary to give so lovely and familiar an opening phrase so tedious an end.

"Don't tell me," he added quickly, repenting his thoughtless question. "What nightingales! What figs! And what apricocks!" (for so he always called this fruit). He hated to talk about atheists, and about how God had fashioned so beautiful a world. It might be so, but the world, on such a night, was enough in itself.

Dr. Franchi's keen, gentle eyes, the eyes of a shrewd weigher of men, observed him and his distastes.

"An æsthete," he judged. "God has given him intuition rather than reason. And not very much even of that. He might easily be misled, this youth."

Aloud he said, "All I meant was that

"'Holy joy about the earth is shed,
And Holiness upon the deep,'

as one of your Edwardian poets has sung. That was a gifted generation: may it rest in peace. For I think it mostly perished in that calamitous war we had. . . . But your Georgians—they too are a gifted generation, is it not so?"

"You mean by Georgians those persons who are now flourishing under the sovereignty of King George the Fifth of England? Such as myself? I do not really know. How could it be that gifts go in generations? A generation, surely, is merely chronological. Gifts are sporadic. No, I find no generation, as such, gifted. Except, of course, with the gifts common to all humanity . . . People speak of the Victorians, and endow them with special qualities, evil or good. They were all black recently; now they are being white-washed—or rather enamelled. I think they had no qualities, as a generation (or rather as several generations, which, of course, they were); men and women then were, in the main, the

same as men and women to-day. I see nothing but individuals. The rest is all the fantasy of the foolish, who love to generalise, till they cannot see the trees for the wood. Generalisations make me dizzy. I see nothing but the separate trees. There *is* nothing else. . . ."

Dreamily Henry wandered on, happy and fluent with wine and figs. A ripe black fig, gaping to show its scarlet maw—what could be more lovely, and more luscious to the palate?

As to Miss Longfellow, she was eating her dessert so rapidly and with such relish that she had no time for conversation. All she contributed to it was, between bites, a cheerful nod now and then at Henry to show that she agreed with him.

"Yours," said Dr. Franchi, "is not, perhaps, the most natural view of life. It is more natural to see people in large groups, with definite characteristic markings, according to period, age, nationality, sex, or what not. Also, such a view has its truth, though, like all truths, it may be over-stressed. . . . But here comes our coffee. After we have

drunk it, Gina will leave us perhaps and you and I will smoke our cigars and have a little talk on political questions, and matters outside a woman's interests. Our Italian women do not take the same interest in affairs which your English women do."

"No," Miss Longfellow readily agreed. "We don't like the New Woman over here. Perhaps Mr. Beechtree admires her though."

"The New Woman?" Henry doubtfully queried. "Is there a new woman? I don't know the phrase, except from old Victorian *Punch* Pictures. . . . Thank you, yes; a little cherry brandy."

"Ah, is the woman question, then, over in your country—died out? Fought to a finish, perhaps, with honours to the victorious sex?"

"The woman question, sir? What woman question? I know no more of woman questions than of man questions, I am afraid. There is an infinity of questions you may ask about all human beings. People ask them all the time. Personally, I don't; it is less trouble not to. There people

are; you can take them or leave them, for what they're worth. Why ask questions about them? There is never a satisfactory answer."

"A rather difficult youth to talk to," the ex-cardinal reflected. "He fails to follow up, or, apparently, even to understand, any of the usual conversational gambits. Is he very ignorant, or merely perverse?"

As to Miss Longfellow, she gave Henry up as being not quite all there, and anyhow a bloodless kind of creature, who took very little notice of her. So she went indoors and played the piano.

"I am failing," thought Henry. "She does not like me. I am not being intelligent. They will talk of things above my head, things I cannot understand."

Apathy held him, drinking cherry brandy under the moon, and he could not care. Woman question? Man question? What was all this prating?

17

"And now," said Dr. Franchi, as he enjoyed a cigar and Henry a cigarette and both their liqueurs, "let us talk of this mysterious business of poor Svensen."

"Yes, do let's," said Henry, for this was much more in his line.

"I may misjudge you, Mr. Beechtree, but I have made a guess that you entertain certain suspicions in this matter. Is that the case? Ah, I see I am right. No, tell me nothing you do not wish. In fact, tell me nothing at all. It would be, at this point, indiscreet. Instead, let us go through all the possible alternatives." He paused, and puffed at his cigar for a while in thoughtful silence.

"First of all," he presently resumed, "poor Svensen may have met with an accident. He may have fallen into the lake and have been drowned. But this we will set aside as improbable. Geneva is seldom quite deserted at night, and he would have attracted attention. Besides

which, I have heard that he is an excellent swimmer. No; an improbable contingency. What remains? Foul play. Some person or persons have attacked him in a deserted spot and either murdered or kidnapped him. But who? And for what purpose? Robbery? Personal enmity? Revenge? Or an impersonal motive, such as a desire, for some reason, to damage and retard the doings of the Assembly? It might be any of these. . . . Let us for a moment take the hypothesis that it is the last. To whom, then, might such a desire be attributed? Unfortunately, my dear Mr. Beechtree, to many different persons."

"But more to some than to others," Henry brightly pointed out.

"Certainly more to some than to others. More to the Poles than to the Lithuanians, for instance, for is it not to the Polish interest to hold up the proceedings of the Assembly while the present violation of the Lithuanian frontier by Polish hordes continues? Well they know that any inquiry into that matter set on foot by the League would end in their discomfiture. Every day that they can

retard the appointment of a committee of inquiry is to the good, from their point of view.

"Again, take Russia. The question of the persecution of the Bolsheviks is to be brought up in the Assembly early. Naturally the Russian delegation are not anxious for the exposure of their governmental methods which would accompany this. And then there are the Bolshevik refugees themselves—a murderous gang, who would readily dispose of any one, from mere habit. Nor can Argentine be supposed to be anxious for the inquiry into her dispute with Paraguay which the Paraguay delegation intend to bring forward. The Argentine delegation may well have orders to delay this inquiry as long as possible, in order that the dispute may arrange itself domestically, in Argentine interests, without the intervention of the League. There is, too, the Graeco-Turkish war, which both the Greeks and the Turks desire to carry on in peace. There are also several questions of humanitarian legislation, which by no means all the members of the League desire to see proceeded with—the

traffic in women, for instance, and that in certain drugs. And what about the Irish delegates? Are they not both, for their different reasons, full of anger and discontent against Great Britain and against Europe in general, and may they not well intend, in the determined manner of their race, to hold up the association of nations at the pistol's mouth, so to speak, until it considers their grievances and adjudicates in their favour? And then we must not exclude from suspicion the natives of this city and canton. Calvinists are, in my experience, capable of any malicious crime. A dour, jealous, unpleasant people. They might (and often have they done so) perpetrate any wickedness in the name of the curious God they worship."

"Indeed, yes," said Henry. "How confusing it all is, to be sure! But you haven't mentioned the biggest stumbling-block of all, sir—disarmament."

"Ah, yes; disarmament. As you say, the most tremendous issue of all. And it is, as every one knows, going to be, during this session of the League, decisively dealt

with by the Council. Many a nation, militant from terror, from avarice, from arrogance, or from habit, many a political faction, and many a big business, has a vital interest in hindering disarmament discussions. You think then, that——"

"I will tell you," said Henry, leaning forward eagerly and lowering his rather high voice, "what I think. I think that there are those not far from us who have a great deal of money in armaments, and who get nervy whenever the subject comes up. There are things that I know. . . . I came out here knowing them, and meaning to speak when the time came. Not because it was my duty, which is why (I understand) most people expose others, but because I had a very great desire to. There is some one towards whom I feel a dislike—a very great dislike; I may say hate. He deserves it. He is a most disagreeable person, and has done me, personally, a great injury"—(Henry was feeling the expansive influence of the cherry brandy)—"and naturally I wish to do him one in my turn. I have wished it for several years; to be exact, since the year 1919.

I have waited and watched. I have always known him to be detestable, but until recently I thought that he was also detestably and invariably in the right—or, anyhow, that he could not be proved in the wrong. Lately I learnt something that altered this opinion. I discovered a thing about him which would, if it were known (having regard to the position he occupies), utterly shame and discredit him. I am now, I have a feeling, on the track of discovering yet another and a worse thing—that he has done away with the elected President of the Assembly, in order to wreck the proceedings so that the armament question should not come up."

"The armament question?"

Henry gazed at the ex-cardinal with the wide, ferocious stare of the slightly intoxicated.

"What would you say if I told you that a certain highly placed official on the League of Nations Secretariat has enormous sums of money invested in an armaments business? That he derives nearly all his income from it? That he is the son-in-law of the head

of the business, and has in it vast sums which increase at every rumour of war and which would dwindle away if any extensive disarmament scheme should ever really be seriously contemplated by the nations? That his father-in-law, this munitions prince, is even now in Geneva, privately visiting his daughter and son-in-law and holding a watching brief on the Assembly proceedings? I ask you, what would the League staff say of one of their members of which this should be revealed? Would he be regarded as a fit incumbent of the office he holds? Wouldn't he be dismissed, kicked out as incompetent—as unscrupulous, I mean," Henry amended quickly. His voice had risen in a shrill and trembling crescendo of dislike.

Dr. Franchi, leaning placidly back in his chair, his delicate fingers stroking a large Persian cat on his knee, shrewdly watched him.

"I had better say," he observed, in his temperate and calming manner, "that I believe I know to whom you allude. I have guessed, since I saw you this morning

when a certain individual was speaking near you, that you took no favourable view of him. And now I perceive that you are justified. You will be doubly justified if we can prove, what I am trying to agree with you is not improbable, that he has indeed made away with this unfortunate Svensen. I am tempted to share your view of this unpleasing person. Among other things he is a Catholic convert; as to these we have already exchanged our views. . . . Do you know what I think? This; that Svensen's will not be the only disappearance at Geneva. For what would be the use of getting rid of one man only, however prominent? The Assembly, after the first shock, would proceed with its doings. But what if man after man were to disappear? What if the whole fabric of Assembly, Council, and Committees should be disintegrated, till no one could have thoughts for anything but the mysterious disappearances and how to solve the riddle, and how, still more, to preserve each one himself from a like fate? Could any work be continued in such circumstances, in such an atmosphere?

No. The Assembly would become merely a collection of bewildered and nervous individuals turning themselves into amateur detectives, and, incidentally, the laughing-stock of the world. The League might never recover such prestige as it has, after such a disastrous session. Mark my words; there will be further attempts on the persons of prominent delegates. Whether they will be successful attempts or not is a question. Who is responsible for them is another question. You say (and I am half with you) our friend of the Secretariat, who had better be nameless until we can bring him to book. Others will say other things. Many will be suspected. Notably, no doubt, the Spanish Americans, who lend themselves readily to such suspicions; they have that air, and human life is believed not to be unduly sacred to them. Besides, they never got on with Svensen, who is reported to have alluded to them not infrequently as "those damned Red Indians." The Scandinavian temperament and theirs are so different. I do not even feel sure myself that they are not implicated. The initiation of the affair

by our Secretariat friend would not, in fact, preclude their participation in it. I had nearly said, show me a Spanish-American, still worse a Portuguese, and I will show you a scoundrel. Nearly, but not quite, for it is a mistake to say such things of one's brothers in the League. Besides, I like them. They are pleasing, amusing fellows, and do not rasp one's nerves like the Germans and many others. One can forgive them much; indeed, one has to. Many people, again, would be glad to put responsibility on the Germans. An unfortunate race, for nothing is so unfortunate as to be unloved. We must discover the truth, Mr. Beechtree. You have a line of inquiry to follow?"

"I am making friends with the fellow's secretary," said Henry. "She likes me, I may say. And she talks quite a lot. She would not consciously betray her chief's confidence, though she does not like him; but all the same I get many clues from her. . . . Oh, my God——!"

The ejaculation, which was made under his breath, was shocked involuntarily out

of him by the sight of Dr. Franchi's Persian cat extracting with its paw from a bowl that stood on the terrace balustrade a large gold-fish and devouring it.

After the first glance Henry looked away, leaning back in his chair, momentarily overcome with a feeling of nausea, which made his face glisten white and damp, and caused the sweat to break hotly on his brow, while the lake swayed and darkened before his eyes. It was a feeling to which he was unfortunately subject when he saw the smaller of God's creatures suffering these mischances at the hands of their larger brethren. His nerves were not strong, and he had an excessive dislike of witnessing unpleasant sights.

"You don't feel well?" Dr. Franchi solicitously inquired.

"The gold-fish," his guest murmured. "Eaten alive . . . what an end!"

Dr. Franchi's delicate, dark Latin brows rose.

"The gold-fish? Ah, my wicked Pellico. . . . I cannot keep him from the bowl, the rascal. I regret that he so upset you. But

the sensibility of gold-fish is not great, surely? As the peasants say, non son chretiani loro!"

"Forgive me. To see a live fish devoured . . . it took me unawares. . . . I shall be all right soon. . . ."

As from a great distance Henry, still fighting the sensation of nausea, was half aware of the ex-cardinal's piercing eyes fixed on him with extraordinary intensity.

"I am all right now," said Henry. "A momentary faintness—quite absurd. . . . I expect gold-fish do not really feel either emotion or pain. They say that fish do not feel hooks. Or worms, either. . . . They say all sorts of comforting things about this distressing world, don't they. One should try to believe them all. . . ."

"You are," said Dr. Franchi quietly, "if I may say so, a decidedly unusual young man."

"Indeed, no," said Henry. "But I have encroached on you long enough. I must go."

18

The motor-launch churned its foaming path down the moonlit lake. Henry sat in the stern, trailing his fingers in cool, phosphorescent water, happy, drowsy, and well fed. What a delightful evening! What a charming old man! What a divine way of being taken home! And now he had the warm, encouraged feeling of not pursuing a lone trail, for the ex-cardinal's last words to him had been: "Coraggio! Follow every clue; push home every piece of evidence. Between us we will yet lay this enemy of the public good by the heel."

The very thought that they would yet do that flushed Henry's cheek and kindled his eye.

Assuredly the wicked should not always flourish like the bay tree. "I went by, and lo he was not," thought Henry, quoting the queer message received by the President before the first session of the Assembly.

The launch dashed up to the Quai du Seujet, and Henry presented a franc to the

pilot, and stepped off, trying to emulate this gentleman's air of never having visited such a low wharf before. "You have brought me rather too far," he said. "But I will walk back."

But, now he came to think of it, Dr. Franchi's man must obviously know where he lived, so camouflage was unavailing. He had intended (only, lost in thought, he had let the moment pass) to be set down at the Paquis, as if he had been staying on the Quai du Mont Blanc or thereabouts. But he had said nothing, and, without doubt or hesitation, this disagreeable chauffeur (or whatever an electric launch man was called) had made for the Quai du Seujet and drawn up at it, as if he knew, as doubtless he did, that Henry's lodging was in one of the squalid alleys off it.

It could not be helped. Things do get about; Henry knew that of old. However, to maintain the effect of his words to the man, he started to walk away from the St. Gervais quarter towards the Mont Blanc bridge, until the launch was foaming on its homeward way. Then he retraced his steps.

As he passed the end of the bridge, he saw a well-known and characteristic figure, small, trim, elegant, the colour of ivory, clad in faultless evening dress, beneath an equally faultless light coat, standing by the parapet. Some one was with him, talking to him—an equally characteristic figure, less well known to the world at large, but not less well known to Henry.

Henry stopped abruptly, and stood in the shadow of a newspaper kiosk. He was not in the least surprised. Any hour of the day or night did for Charles Wilbraham to talk to the great. He would leave a dinner at the same time as the most important person present, in order to accompany him on his way. He would waylay cabinet ministers in streets, bishops (though himself not of their faith) in closes, and royal personages incognito. He would impede their progress, or walk delicately beside them, talking softly, respectfully, with that perfect propriety of diction and address which he had always at command.

"Soapy Sam," muttered Henry from behind the kiosk.

The two on the bridge moved on. They came towards Henry, strolling slowly and talking. The well-known personage was apparently telling an amusing story, for Charles was all attention and all smiles.

"As Chang was saying to me the other night," Henry prospectively and unctuously quoted Charles.

They left the bridge, and turned along the Quai du Mont Blanc. Charles's rather high laugh sounded above the current of their talk.

They paused at the Hotel des Bergues. The eminent person mounted its steps; Charles accompanied him up the steps and inside. Probably the eminent person wished, by calling on some one there, to shake off Charles before going to his own hotel. But he had not shaken off Charles, who was of a tenacious habit.

"Calling on the Latin Americans," Henry commented. "Wants to have a drink and a chat without Charles. Won't get it, poor chap. Well, I shall sleuth around till they come out. I'm going to trail Charles home to his bed, if it takes all night."

He settled himself on the parapet of the Quai and watched the hotel entrance. He did not have to wait long. In some minutes Charles came out alone. He looked, thought Henry, observing him furtively from under his pulled down hat brim, a little less elated than he had appeared five minutes earlier. His self-esteem had suffered some blow, thought Henry, who knew Charles's mentality. Mentality: that was the word one used about Charles, as if he had been a German during the late war (Germans having, as all readers of newspapers will remember, mentalities).

Charles walked rapidly across the bridge, towards the road that led to his own châlet, a mile out of the town. Henry, keeping his distance, hurried after him, through the steep, silent, sleeping city, up on to the dusty, tram-lined, residential road above it, till Charles stopped at a villa gate and let himself in.

Then Henry turned back, and tramped drowsily down the dusty road beneath the moonless sky, and down through the steep, sleeping city, and across the Pont des Bergues,

and so to the Quai du Seujet and the Allée Petit Chat, which lay dense and black and warm in shadow, and was full of miawling cats, strange sounds, and queer acrid smells. The drainage system of the St. Gervais quarter was crude.

In the stifling bedroom of his crazy tenement, Henry undressed and sleepily tumbled into bed as the city clock struck two.

In the dawn, below the miawling of lean cats and the yelping of dogs, he heard the lapping and shuffling of water, and thought of boats and beating oars.

19

To what cold seas of inchoate regret, of passionate agnosticism as to the world's meanings, if any, does one too often wake, and know not why! Henry, on some mornings, would wake humming (as the queer phrase goes) with prosperity, and spring, warm and alive, to welcome the new day. On other mornings it would be as if

he shivered perplexed on the brink of a fathomless abyss, and life engulfed him like chill waters, and he would strive, defensively, to divest himself of himself and be but as one of millions of the ant-like creatures that scurry over the earth's face, of no more significance to himself than were the myriad others. He could just achieve this state of impersonality while he lay in bed. But when he got up, stood on the floor, looked at the world no longer from beyond its rim but from within its coils, he became again enmeshed, a creature crying "I, I, I," a child wanting Pears' soap and never getting it, a pilgrim here on earth and stranger. Then the seas of desolation would swamp him and he would sink and sink, tumbled in their bitter waves.

In such a mood of causeless sorrow he woke late on the morning after he had dined with Dr. Franchi. To keep it at arms' length he lay and stared at his crazy, broken shutters, off which the old paint flaked, and thought of the infinite strangeness of all life, a pastime which very often engaged him. Then he thought of some one whom

he very greatly loved, and was refreshed by that thought; and, indeed, to love and be loved very greatly is the one stake to cling to in these troubled seas, the one unfailing life-buoy. Then, turning his mind into practical channels, he thought of hate, and of Charles Wilbraham, and of how best to strive that day to compass him about with ruin.

So meditating, he splashed himself from head to foot with cold water, dressed, and sallied forth from his squalid abode to the nearest café. Coffee and rolls and the Swiss morning papers and the clear jolly air of the September morning put heart into him, as he sat outside the café by the lake. Opening his paper, he read of "Femme coupée en morceaux" and "L'Affaire Svensen," and then a large heading, "Disparition de Lord Burnley." Henry started. Here was news indeed. And he had failed to get hold of it for his paper. Lord Burnley, it seemed, had been strolling alone about the city in the late afternoon; many people had seen him in the Rue de la Cité and the neighbourhood. He had even been observed

to enter a bookshop. The rest was silence. From that bookshop he had not been seen to emerge. The bookseller affirmed that he had left after spending a few minutes in the shop. No further information was to hand.

"*Cherchez la femme*," one comic paper had the audacity to remark, à propos l'affaire Svensen and Burnley. Even Svensen and Burnley, so pure-hearted, so public-spirited, so League-minded, were not immune from such ill-bred aspersions.

20

The elegant and scholarly Spaniard, Luiz Vaga, strolled by. He wore a canary-coloured waistcoat and walked like a fastidious and graceful bullfinch. He stopped beside Henry's breakfast-table, cocked his head on one side, and said, "Hallo. Good-morning. Heard the latest news?"

Henry admitted that he had heard no news later than that in the morning press.

"Chang's gone now," said Vaga. "Gone

to join Svensen and Burnley. I regret to say that he was last seen, late last night, paying a call on my fellow-countrymen from South America at Les Bergues hotel. Serious suspicion rests on these gentlemen, for poor Chang has not been heard of since."

"Somehow," Henry said thoughtfully, "I am not surprised. L'addition, s'il vous plaît. No, I cannot say I am surprised. I rather thought that there would be more disappearances very shortly. Burnley and Chang. A good haul. . . . Who saw him going into the Bergues?"

"Our friend Wilbraham, who was out late with him last night. And the Bergues people don't deny it. But they say he left again, soon after midnight. The hall porter, who has, it is presumed, been corrupted, confirms this. But he never returned to his hotel. Poor Burnley and Chang! Two good talkers, scholars, and charming fellows. There are few such, in this vulgar age. It is taking the best, this unseen hand that strikes down our delegates in their prime. So many could be spared. . . . But God's will must be done. These South Americans are its

very fitting tools, for they don't care what they do, reckless fellows. Mind you, I don't accuse them. Personally I should be more inclined to suspect the Zionists, or the Bolshevik refugees, or your Irishmen, or some of the Unprotected Minorities, or the Poles, or the Anti-Vivisection League, who are very fierce. But, for choice, the Poles; anyhow as regards Burnley. There were certain words once publicly spoken by Burnley to the Polish delegation about General Zeligowsky which have rankled ever since. Zeligowsky has many wild disbanded soldiers at his command. . . . However —Chang, anyhow, went to see the South Americans, and has not emerged. There we are."

"There we are," Henry thoughtfully agreed, as they strolled over the Pont du Mont Blanc. "And what, then, is Wilbraham's explanation of the affair Chang?"

Vaga shrugged his shoulders.

"Our friend Wilbraham is too discreet to make allegations. He merely states the fact—that he saw Chang into the Bergues between twelve and one and left him there.

. . . I gather that he accompanied him into the hotel, but did not stay there long himself. I can detect a slight acrimony in his manner on the subject, and deduce from it that he was not perhaps encouraged by Dr. Chang or his hosts to linger. I flatter myself I know Wilbraham's mentality fairly well—if one may be permitted that rather opprobrious word."

"Yes, indeed," Henry said. "It is precisely what Wilbraham has. I know it well."

"In that case, I believe if you had heard Wilbraham on this matter of his call at Les Bergues that you would agree with me that his importance suffered there some trifling eclipse."

"There may be other reasons," said Henry, "in this case, for the manner you speak of. . . . But I won't say any more now." He bit off the stream of libel that had risen to his lips and armed himself in a careful silence, while the Spaniard cocked an inquiring dark eye at his brooding profile.

In the Jardin Anglais they overtook Dr. Franchi and his niece, making their way to the Assembly Hall. The ex-cardinal was

greatly moved. "Poor Dr. Chang," he lamented, "and Burnley too, of all men! A wit, a scholar, a philosopher, a metaphysician, a theologian, a man of affairs. In fine, a man one could talk to. What a mind! I am greatly attached to Lord Burnley. They must be found, gentlemen. Alive or (unthinkable thought) dead, they must be found. The Assembly must do nothing else until this sinister mystery is unravelled. We must employ detectives. We must follow every clue."

Miss Longfellow said, "My! Isn't it all quite too terribly sinister! Don't you think so, Mr. Beechtree?"

Henry said he did.

21

They reached the Assembly Hall. The lobby, buzzing with delegates, Secretariat, journalists, Genevan syndics, and excitement, was like a startled hive. The delegates from Cuba, Chili, Bolivia, and Paraguay, temporarily at one, were informing the eager

throng who crowded round them that Dr. Chang had left the Bergues hotel, after a chat and a whisky with the delegate from Paraguay, at twelve-thirty precisely. The delegate from Paraguay had gone out with him and had left him on the Pont des Bergues. He had said that he was going to cross this bridge and stroll round the old *cité* before going to bed, as he greatly admired the picturesque night aspect of these ancient streets and houses that clustered round the cathedral. He had then, presumably, made his way to this old, tortuous and unsafe maze of streets, so full of dark archways, trap-doors, cellars, winding stairways, evil smells, and obscure alleys. ("These alleys," as a local guide-book coldly puts it, "are not well inhabited, but the visitor may safely go through those of houses 5 and 17." Had Dr. Chang, perhaps, been through, part of the way through, numbers 4 or 16 instead?)

"That's right; put it on the *cité*," muttered Grattan, who was fond of this part of Geneva, for he often dined there, and who admired the representatives of the South

American states as hopeful agents of crime and mystery.

No evidence, it seemed, was forthcoming that any one had seen Dr. Chang in the *cité*, but then, as the delegate from Paraguay remarked, even the inhabitants of the *cité* must sleep sometimes.

Police and detectives had early been put to work to search the cathedral quarter. Systematically they were making inquiries in it, street by street, house by house. Systematically, too, others were making inquiries in the old St. Gervais quarter.

"But police detective work is never any good," as Henry, a well-read person in some respects, remarked. "It is well known that one requires non-constabulary talent."

22

The bell rang, and a shaken and disorganised Assembly assembled in the hall. The Deputy-President, in an impassioned speech, lamented the sinister disappearance of his three so eminent colleagues. As he

remarked, this would not do. Some evil forces were at work, assaulting the very life of the League, for it must now be apparent that these disappearances were not coincidences, but links in a connected chain of crime. What and whose was the unseen hand behind these dastardly deeds? What secret enemies of the League were so cunningly and assiduously at work? Was murder their object, or merely abduction? Whose turn would it be next? (At this last inquiry a shudder rippled over the already agitated assembly.) But MM. les Délégués might rest assured that what could be done was being done, both for the discovery of their eminent colleagues, the detection of the assaulters, and the aversion of such disasters in future.

At this point the delegate for Greece leapt to his feet.

"*What*," he demanded, "is being done with this last object? What provision is being made for the safety of our persons?"

His question was vigorously applauded, while the English interpreter, quite unheard, explained it to those in the hall who lacked adequate knowledge of the French language.

The Deputy-President was understood to reply that it was uncertain as yet what effective steps could be taken, but that all the forces of law and order in Geneva had been invoked, and that MM. les Délégués were hereby warned not to go about alone by night, or, indeed, much by day, and not to venture into obscure streets or doubtful-looking shops.

Mademoiselle the delegate from Roumania demanded the word. Mademoiselle the delegate for Roumania was a large and buxom lady with a soft, mellifluous voice that cooed like a turtle-dove's when she spoke eloquently from platforms of the wrongs of unhappy women and poor children. This delegate was female indeed. Not hers the blue-stocking sexlessness of the Scandinavian lady delegates, with their university degrees, their benign, bumpy foreheads, and their committee manners. She had been a mistress of kings; she was a very woman, full of the *élan* of sex. When she swam on to the platform and turned her eyes to the ceiling, it was seen that they brimmed with tears.

"Mon Dieu, M. le Vice-Président,"

she ejaculated. "Mon Dieu!" And proceeded in her rich, voluptuous voice to dwell on the iniquities of the traffic in women and children all over the world. The nets of these traffickers were spread even in Geneva —that city of good works—and who would more greatly desire to make away with the good men of the League of Nations than these wicked traffickers? How well it was known among them that Lord Burnley, Dr. Svensen, and Dr. Chang held strong opinions on this subject. . . .

At this point a French delegate leaped to his feet and made strong and rapid objection to these accusations. No one more strongly than his pure and humane nation disliked this iniquitous traffic in flesh and blood, but the devil should have his due, and there was no proof that the traffickers were guilty of the crimes now under discussion. Much might be allowed a lady speaker in the height of her womanly indignation, which did credit to her heart and sex, but scarcely so much as that.

For a moment it looked like a general squabble, for other delegates sprang to their

feet and called out, and the interpreters, dashing round the hall with notebooks, could scarcely keep pace, and every one was excited except the Japanese, who sat solemnly in rows and watched. For the hold, usually so firm, exercised by the chair over the Assembly, had given way under the stress of these strange events, and in vain did the Deputy-President knock on the table with his hammer and cry "Messieurs! Messieurs! La parole est à Mademoiselle la Déléguée de la Roumanie!"

But he could not repress those who called out vehemently that "Il ne s'agit pas à present de la traite des femmes; il s'agit seulement de la disparition de Messieurs les Délégués!" And something unconsidered was added about those states more recently admitted to the League, which had to be hastily suppressed.

Mademoiselle la Déléguée on the platform continued meanwhile to coo to heaven her indignation at the iniquitous traffic in these unhappy women, until the Deputy-President, in his courteous and charming manner, suggested in her ear that she should, for the

sake of peace, desist, whereupon she smiled and bowed and swept down into the hall, to be surrounded by congratulating friends shaking her by the hand.

"M. Menavitch demande la parole," announced the Deputy-President, who should have known better. The delegate for the Serb-Croat-Slovene state stood up in his place (it was scarcely worth while to ascend the platform for his brief comments) and remarked spitefully that he had just (as so often) had a telegram from Belgrade to the effect that a thousand marauding Albanians had crossed their frontier and were invading Serbia, and that, to his personal knowledge, there was a gang of these marauders in Geneva, and, in his view, the responsibility for any ruffianly crime committed in this city was not far to seek. He then sat down, amid loud applause from the Greeks and cries of "shame" from the English-speaking delegates. A placid Albanian bishop rose calmly to reply. He, too, it seemed, had had a telegram from the seat of his government, and his was about the Serbs, but before he had time to state its contents the

Deputy-President stayed the proceedings. "The session," he said, "cannot be allowed to degenerate into an exchange of international personalities."

"And hwy not?" inquired the Belfast voice of the delegate from Ulster. "I'd say the Pope of Rome had some knowledge of this. I wouldn't put it past him to have plotted the whole thing."

"Ask the Black and Tans," his Free State colleague was naturally moved to retort.

"My God," whispered the Secretary-General to the Deputy-President. "If the Irish are off. . . . We must stop this."

Fortunately, here the delegates for Paraguay eased the situation by proposing that the question of the disappearance of delegates should be referred to a committee to be elected for that purpose, and that the voting for that committee should begin forthwith. (The South American delegates always welcomed the appointment of committees, for they always hoped to be on them.) Lord John Lester, one of the delegates from

Central Africa, who was less addicted to committees, thinking that their methods lacked expedition, rose to protest, but was overruled. The Assembly as a whole would obviously feel happier about this affair if it were in committee hands, so the elections were proceeded with at once. The delegate for Central Africa resigned himself, only remarking that he hoped at least that the sessions of the committee would be public, for as he had often said, publicity was the life blood of the League.

Journalists in the Press Gallery breathed a sigh of disappointment. "In another minute," said the *Times* to Henry, "we should have had the Poles accusing the Lithuanians, the Greeks the Turks, the Turks the Armenians, and every one the Germans. Already the French are running round with a tale about the Germans having done it out of revenge for the Silesian decision. Probably it's quite true. Only I back the Bolshevik refugees to have had a hand in it somewhere too. Well, I shall go lobbying, and hear the latest."

Henry too went lobbying.

In the lobby something of a fracas was proceeding between a member of the Russian delegation and a Bolshevik refugee. It seemed that the latter was accusing the former of having been responsible for the disappearance of Dr. Svensen, who had always had such a kind heart for starving Russians, and who had irritated the Whites in old days by sending money to the Bolshevik government for their relief. The accusing refugee, who looked a hairy ruffian indeed, was supported by applause from a claque of Finns, Ruthenians, Lithuanians, Esthonians, Latvians, and others who had a dislike for the Russian Empire. M. Kratzky's well-earned nickname, " Butcher of Odessa," was freely hurled at him, and the Slavs present were all in an uproar, as Slavs will be if you excite them.

Gravely, from a little way off, a group of Japanese looked on.

" Obviously," the *Times* murmured discreetly, " the Bolshies think attack the best form of self-defence. I'm much mistaken if they don't know something of this business." For it was well known that the

exiled Bolsheviks were vexed at the admission of monarchist Russia to the League, and might take almost any means (Russians, whether White or Red, being like that) of showing it.

"An enemy hath done this thing," murmured the gentle voice of Dr. Silvio Franchi to Lord John Lester, who had walked impatiently out of the Assembly Hall when the voting began, because he did not believe that a committee was going to be of the least use in finding his friends. He turned courteously towards the ex-cardinal, whom he greatly liked.

"What discord, where all was harmony and brotherhood!" continued Dr. Franchi sadly.

"Not quite all. Never quite all, even before," corrected Lord John, who, though an idealist, faced facts. There were always elements of . . . But we were on the way; we were progressing. And now—this."

He waved his hand impatiently at the vociferous Slavs, and then at the door of the Assembly Hall. "All at one another's throats; all hurling accusations; all getting

telegrams from home about each other; all playing the fool. And there are some people who say there is no need for a League of Nations in such a world!"

23

Impatiently Lord John Lester pushed his way through the chattering crowds in the lobby, and out into the street. He wanted to breathe, and to get away from the people who regarded the recent disasters mainly as an excitement, a news story, or a justification for their international distastes. To him they were pure horror and grief. They were his friends who had disappeared; it was his League which was threatened.

Moodily he walked along the paths of the Jardin Anglais; broodingly he seated himself upon a bench and stared frowning at the *jet d'eau*, and suspected, against his will, the Spanish and Portuguese Americans.

A large lady in purple, walking on high-heeled shoes as on stilts, and panting a little from the effort, stopped opposite him.

"Such a favour!" she murmured. "I told my husband it was too much to ask. But no, he would have it. He made me come and speak to you. I've left him over there by the fountain." She creaked and sat down on the bench, and Lord John, who had risen as she addressed him, sat down too, wondering how most quickly to get away.

"The Union," said the lady; and at that word Lord John bent towards her more attentively. "Lakeside branches. We're starting them, my husband and I, in all the lake villages. So important; so necessary. These villages are terribly behind the times. They simply *live* in the past. And what a past! Picturesque if you will—but not progressive—oh, no! So some of us have decided that there *must* be a branch of the Union in every lake village. We have brought a little band of organisers over to Geneva to-day, to attend the Assembly. But the Assembly is occupied this morning in electing committees. Necessary, of course; but no mention of the broader principles on which the League rests can be made until the voting is over. So we are having a little

business meeting in an office off the Rue Croix d'Or. And when my husband and I caught sight of you he said to me, 'If only we could get Lord John to come right away now and address a few words to our little gathering—oh, but really quite a few—its dead bones would live! Now, do I ask too much, Lord John?"

"My dear lady," said Lord John, "I'm really sorry, but I simply haven't the time. I wish you all the luck in the world, but——"

The purple lady profoundly sighed.

"I *told* my husband so. It was too much to ask. He's a colonel, you know—an Anglo-Indian—and always goes straight for what he wants, never hesitating. He *would* make me ask you; . . . but at least we have your good wishes, Lord John, haven't we?"

"Indeed, yes."

"The motto of our little village branches," she added as she rose, is *Si vis pacem, para bellum.* Or, in some villages, *Si vis bellum, para pacem.* Both so true, aren't they? Now which do you think is the best?"

Lord John Lester looked down at her in silence, momentarily at a loss for an answer.

"Really, my dear lady, . . . I'm afraid I don't like either at all. In fact, neither in any way expresses the ideals or principles of the League."

She looked disappointed.

"Now, you *don't* say so! But those are the lines we're founding our branches on. One has to be so careful, don't you think, or a branch may get on the wrong lines, with all these peace cranks about. And every branch has its influence. They're ignorant in these lake villages, but they do mean well, and they're only anxious to learn. If only you would come and tell our little organising band how we *ought* to start them!"

Lord John, having taken the lady in, from her topmost purple feathers to her pin-like heels, decided that, in all probability, she had not got a League mind. And she and the Anglo-Indian colonel (who probably had not got this type of mind either, for Anglo-Indian colonels so exceedingly often have another) were going to

start branches of the League of Nations Union all up the lake, to be so many centres of noxious, watered-down, meaningless League velleity, of the type which he, Lord John, found peculiarly repugnant. Perhaps, after all, it might be his duty to go and say a few wholesome words to the little organising band assembled in the office off the Rue Croix d'Or. Yes; it was obviously his duty, and not to be shirked. With a sigh he looked at his watch. It need not take him more than half an hour, all told.

"Very well," he said. "If you would find a very few words of any use——"

She gave a joyful pant.

"You're *too* good, Lord John! *How* grateful we shall all be! You shall tell us *all* about how we ought to do it, and give us some really *good* mottoes! . . . I remember helping with branches of the National Service League before the war, and they had such a nice motto—'The path of duty is the way to safety.' . . . *That* would be a good Union motto, don't you think? Or '*Festina lente*'—for we mustn't be impatient, must

we? Or, 'Hands across the sea!' For *nothing* is so important as keeping our *entente* with France intact, is it. . . . The people of this country will not stand any weakening . . . *you* know. . . . My husband reads me that out of the paper at breakfast. . . . There he is . . . Frederick, isn't this good of Lord John. . . ."

24

Professor Arnold Inglis, that most gentle, high-minded and engaging of scholars, who most unfittingly represented part of a wild, hot, uncultured, tropical continent on the League, strolled out after lunch before the meeting of Committee 9 to see the flowers and fruit in the market-place. He was sad, because, like his fellow-delegate and friend, Lord John Lester, he hated this sort of disturbance. Like Lord John, he resented this violence which was assaulting the calm and useful progress of the Assembly, and was torn with anxiety for the fate of the three delegates. He wished he had Lord John

with him this afternoon, that they might discuss the situation, but he had not seen him since he had left the Assembly that morning, so characteristically impatient at the prospect of the appointment of Committee 9.

Professor Inglis stood by a fruit-stall and looked down absently at the lovely mass of brilliant fruit and vegetables that lay on it.

Presently he became aware that some one at his side was pouring forth a stream of not unbeautiful language in a low, frightened voice. Looking round, he saw a small, ugly, malaria-yellow woman, gazing at him with frightened black eyes and clasped hands, and talking rapidly in a curious blend of ancient and modern Greek. What she appeared to be saying was:—

"I am persecuted by Turks; I beg you to succour me!"

"But what," said Professor Inglis, also speaking in a blend, but with more of the ancient tongue in it that had hers, for he was more at home in classical than in modern Greek, "can I do? Can you not appeal to the police?"

"I dare not," she replied. "I am in a minority in my house; I am an unprotected serving-woman, and there are three Turks in the same house who leave me no peace. Even now one of them is waiting for me with a stick because I had a misfortune and broke his hookah."

"It is certainly," said the Professor, "a case for the police. If you do not like to inform them, I will do so myself. Tell me where you live."

"Just round the corner here, in a house in that passage," she said. "Come with me and see for yourself, sir, if you doubt my word as to my sufferings."

Professor Inglis hesitated for a moment, not wishing to be drawn into city brawls, but when she added, "I appealed to you, sir, because I have been told how you are always on the side of the unprotected, and also love the Greeks," his heart melted in him, and he forgot that, though he did indeed love the ancient Greeks, he did not very much care for the moderns of that race (such, for example, as M. Lapoulis, the Greek delegate), and only remembered that

here did indeed seem to be a very Unprotected Minority (towards which persons his heart was always soft), and that the Minority was a woman, poor, ill-favoured, and malarial, talking a Greek more ancient than was customary with her race, and persecuted by Turks, which nation Professor Inglis, in spite of his League mind, could not induce himself to like. All these things he recollected as he stood hesitating by the fruit stall, and he reflected also that, until he had in some degree verified the woman's tale, he would not care to trouble the already much burdened police with it; so, with a little sigh, he turned to the poor woman and told her he would come with her to her house and see for himself, and would then assist her to take steps to protect herself. She thanked him profusely, and led the way to the passage which she had mentioned.

25

Chivalry, pity for the unprotected, love of the Greek tongue, dislike of Turks—by

all these quite creditable emotions was Professor Inglis betrayed, as you may imagine, to his fate.

26

Henry Beechtree, when he left the Assembly Hall, had, for his part, fish to fry in the Secretariat, and thither he made his rapid way. He had arranged to meet Miss Doris Wembley, the secretary of Charles Wilbraham, that morning in her chief's room, and then to lunch with her.

Henry was getting to know Miss Wembley very well. It seemed to him as if he had always known her, as, indeed, he had. He knew the things she would say before she said them. He knew which were the subjects she would expand on, and which would land her, puzzled and uninterested, in inward non-comprehension and verbal assent. She was a nice girl, a jolly girl, an efficient girl, and a very pretty girl. She liked Henry, whom she thought amusing, shabby, and queer.

They began, of course, by talking of the fresh disappearances.

"We've got bets in the Secretariat on who will be the next," she told him. "I've put my money on Branting. I don't know why, but I somehow feel he'll go soon. But some people say it'll be the S.G. himself. . . . Isn't it too awful for their wives, poor things? Poor little Madame Chang! They say she's being simply wonderful."

"Wonderful," repeated Henry. "That's what widows are, isn't it? But is it, I wonder, enough to make one wonderful that one's husband should disappear alive? You see, they may not be dead, these poor delegates; they may exist, hidden away somewhere."

"Oh, dear, yes, I hope so. Isn't it all too weird? Have you *any* theories, Mr. Beechtree?"

Henry looked non-committal and said that doubtless every one in Geneva had their private suspicions (often, for that matter, made public), and that he was no exception. He then turned the conversation on to Wilbraham's father-in-law, who was staying

so privately in Geneva, and they had much fruitful talk on this and other subjects.

27

The Assembly, having elected the committee, and listened to a long speech from a Persian prince about the horrors of modern warfare, and a poem of praise from an eminent Italian Swiss on the beauties of the poet Dante, whose birthday was approaching, broke up for lunch.

The committee (which was to be called Committee 9) was to meet at the Secretariat that afternoon and consider what steps should next be taken. It was a rather large committee, because nearly every one had been anxious to be on it. It consisted of delegates from France, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Central Africa, Sweden, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Albania, Serbia, Brazil, Chili, Bolivia, Panama, Paraguay, Uruguay, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Greece, Poland, Lithuania, and Haiti. Its sessions were to be in private, in spite of the strongly expressed contrary

desire of Lord John Lester. The chairman was the delegate for Paraguay. It was expected that he would carefully and skilfully guide the lines on which the committee should work so that the regrettable suspicions which had accidentally fallen on certain Latin Americans should be diverted into other and more deserving channels.

28

The proceedings of the first meeting of Committee No. 9 can be best reported in the words of the Assembly Journal for the following day. This journal, with its terse and yet detailed accounts of current happenings, its polite yet lucid style, and its red-hot topicality (for it is truly a journal), makes admirable reading for those who like their literature up-to-date. Those who attend the meetings of the Assembly are, as a matter of fact, excellently well-provided by the enterprise of the Secretariat with literature. A delegate's or a journalist's pigeon-hole is far better than a circulating

library. New every morning is the supply, and those who, in their spare hours, like a nice lie down and a nice read (all in two languages) shall have for their entertainment the Assembly Journal for the day, the Verbatim Record of the last meetings of the Assembly and Committees, selected press opinions of the affair (these are often very entertaining, and journalists approach them with the additional interest engendered by the hope that the comments they themselves have sent home to their papers may have been selected for quotation: in passing it may be observed that Henry Beechtree had, in this matter, no luck), and all kinds of documents dealing with every kind of matter —the Traffic in Women, Children, and Opium, the admission of a new State to the League, international disputes, disagreeable telegrams from one country about another, the cost of living in Geneva, the organisation of International Statistics, International Health, or International Education, the Economic Weapon of the League, the status or the frontiers of a Central European state, the desirability of a greater or a less great

publicity, messages from the Esperanto Congress, and so on and so forth; every kind of taste is, in fact, catered for.

To quote, then, the Journal for the day after the first meeting of the Committee for Dealing with the Disappearance of Delegates:—

"Committee No. IX. met yesterday, Wednesday, Sept. 8th, at 3.30 p.m., under the chairmanship of M. Croza (Paraguay).

"The Chairman pointed out that the agenda before the Committee fell under several heads:—

"1. Deprecation of baseless suspicions and malicious aspersions.

"2. Investigation into possible or probable motives for the assaults.

"3. Consideration of the adoption of precautionary measures to safeguard in future the persons of delegates.

"4. Organisation of complete house to house search of the city of Geneva by police.

"5. Consideration of various suspicions based on reason and common sense.

" In order to carry on these lines of inquiry, five sub-committees were appointed, each of which would report to the plenary committee day by day.

" All the sittings of the sub-committees would be in private, as the publicity which had been demanded by one of the delegates from Central Africa would vitiate, in this case, the effectiveness of the inquiry.

" Before the sub-committees separated, several members addressed the committee. M. Gomez (Panama) proposed that special attention should be given to the fact that Geneva at all times, but particularly during the sessions of the Assembly, was a centre of pestilential societies, among whom were to be found in large numbers Socialists, Bolshevists, Freemasons, and Jews. In his opinion, the headquarters of all these societies should be raided. Above all, it should be remembered that the delegates were all brothers in friendship, and as such were above the suspicion of any but the basest minds.

" M. Chapelle (France) said this was indeed true of the delegates, but that it would be

a mistake if the committee should not keep its mind open to all possibilities, and it must be remembered that some of the nations most recently admitted to the League had bands of their fellow-countrymen in Geneva, who were undoubtedly sore in spirit over recent economic and political decisions, and might (without, well understood, the sanction of their delegates) have been guilty of this attack on the personnel of the League by way of revenge.

"Signor Nelli (Italy) strongly deprecated the suggestion of M. Chapelle as unworthy of the spirit of fraternity between nations which should animate members of the League.

"After some further discussion of Item 5 of the agenda, it was agreed to leave it to the sub-committee appointed to consider it, and the committee then broke up into five sub-committees."

The Journal, always discreet, sheltered under the words "further discussion of Item 5" a good deal of consideration of various suspicions based on reason and

common sense. Most members of the committee, in fact, had their suggestions to make; in committee people always felt they could speak more freely than in the Assembly, and did so. Bolshevist refugees, bands of marauding Poles disbanded from General Zeligowski's army, Sinn Feiners, Orangemen, Albanians, Turks, unprotected Armenians, Jugo-Slavs, women-traffickers, opium merchants, Greeks, Zionists, emissaries from Frau Krupp, Mormons, Americans, Indians, and hired assassins from *l'Intransigeant* and the *Morning Post*—all these had their accusers. Finally Mr. Macdermott (Ulster) said he would like to point out what might not be generally known, that there was a very widespread Catholic society of dubious morals and indomitable fanaticism, which undoubtedly had established a branch in Geneva for the Assembly, and much might be attributable to this.

It was this suggestion which finally caused the chairman to break the committee hastily up into its sub-committees. And, as has been said, none of this discussion found its way into the very well-edited Journal,

though it would appear after some days in the *procès-verbaux*.

29

After the committee broke up, Fergus Macdermott from Belfast, who was not on one of the sub-committees, walked briskly away from the Secretariat, and had tea in company with the young man who represented the *Morning Post*, and who was an old school-fellow of his. Excited by his own utterances on the subject of Catholics, Fergus Macdermott suddenly remembered, while drinking his tea, what day it was.

"My God," he remarked, profoundly moved, to Mr. Garth of the *Morning Post*, "it's the 8th of September."

"What then?" inquired Mr. Garth, who was an Englishman and knew not days, except those on which university matches were to be played or races run or armistices celebrated. "What's the 8th?"

The blue eyes of Mr. Macdermott gazed at him with a kind of kindling Orange stare.

"The 8th," he replied, "is a day we keep in Ulster."

"Do you? How?"

"By throwing stones," said Mr. Macdermott, simply and fervently. "At processions, you know. It's a great Catholic day—like August 15th—I forget why. Some Catholic foolery. The birthday of the Virgin Mary, I fancy. Anyhow we throw stones. . . . I wonder will there be any processions here?"

"You can't throw stones if there are," his more discreet friend admonished him. "Pull yourself together, Fergus, and don't look so fell. These things simply aren't done outside your maniac country, you know. Remember where and what you are."

The wild blue fire still leapt in Mr. Macdermott's Celtic eyes. His mind obviously still hovered round processions.

"Of course," he explained, "one couldn't throw stones. Not abroad. But one might go and look on. . . ."

"Certainly not. Not if I can prevent you. You'll disgrace the League by shouting: 'To hell with the Pope.' I know you.

If a procession is anywhere in the offing, it will make you feel so at home that you'll lose your head entirely. Go and find O'Shane and punch his head if you want to let off steam. He'll be game, particularly as it's one of his home festivals too. You're neither of you safe to have loose on the Nativity of the B.V.M., if that's what it is."

Macdermott gazed at the lake with eyes that dreamed of home.

"It'd be a queer thing," he murmured, "if there wouldn't be a procession somewhere to-day, even in this godly Protestant city. . . ."

"Well, in case there should, and to keep you safe, you'd better come and dine with me at eight at my inn. Don't dress. I must go and send off my stuff now. See you later, then."

Fergus Macdermott, left alone, strolled along towards his own hotel, but when he was half-way to it a clashing of bells struck on his ear, and reminded him that the Catholic Church of Notre Dame was only a few streets away. No harm to walk that way, and see if anything was doing. He

did so. On the door of the church a notice announced that the procession in honour of the Nativity of Our Lady would leave the church at eight o'clock and pursue a route, which was given in detail.

"Well, I can't see it," said Fergus Macdermott. "I shall be having dinner." He went back to his hotel and typed out a manifesto, or petition, as he called it, for presentation to the Assembly when quieter times should supervene and make the consideration of general problems possible again. The manifesto was on the subject of the tyranny exercised over Ulster by the Southern Free State Government. At the same moment, in his room at the same hotel, Denis O'Shane, the Free State delegate, was typing *his* manifesto, which was about the tyranny exercised over South Ireland by Ulster.

At 7.45 Macdermott finished his document, read it through with satisfaction and remembered that he had to go and dine with Garth. He left his hotel with this intention, and could not have said at what point his more profound, his indeed innate

intention, which was to go to the Church of Notre Dame, asserted itself. Anyhow, at eight o'clock, there he was in the Place Cornavin, arriving at the outskirts of the crowd which was watching the white-robed crucifer and acolytes leading the procession out of the open church doors and down the steps.

Macdermott, blocked by the crowd, could hardly see. He felt in an inferior position towards this procession, barred from it by a kindly and reverent crowd of onlookers. In his native city things were different. He had here no moral support for his just contempt of Popish flummery. He did not want to do anything to the procession, merely to stare it down with the disgust it deserved, but this was difficult when he could only see it above bared heads.

A voice just above him said, in French: "Monsieur cannot see. He would get a better view from this window here. I beg of you to come in, monsieur."

Looking up, Macdermott saw the face of a kindly old woman looking down at him from the first-floor window of the high

house behind him. Certainly, he admitted, he could not see, and he would rather like to. He entered the hospitable open door, which led into a shop, and ascended a flight of stone steps.

On the top step, in the darkness of a narrow passage, a chloroformed towel was flung and held tight over his head and face, and he was borne to the ground.

30

Thus this young Irishman's strong religious convictions, which did him credit, betrayed him to his doom. But, incomprehensibly, doom in the sense (whatever sense that was) in which it had overtaken his fellow-delegates, was after all averted. He did not disappear into silence as they had. On the contrary, the kindly old woman who had rushed from the front window and bent over him as he lay unconscious on the stair-head, saw him presently open his eyes and stir, and heard the faint, bewildered murmur of " to hell with the Pope," which is what

Orangemen say mechanically when they come to, as others may say, "Where am I?"

Very soon he sat up, dizzily.

"I was chloroformed," he said, "by some damned Republican. Where is the chap? Don't let him make off."

But he was informed that this person had already disappeared. When the old lady of the house, hearing him fall, had come out and found him, there had been no trace of either his assaulter or of the chloroformed towel. The kindly old lady was almost inclined to think that monsieur must have fainted, and fancied the Republican, the chloroform, and the attack.

Fergus Macdermott, who never either fainted or fancied, assured her that this was by no means the case.

"It's part, no doubt," he said, "of this Sinn Fein plot against delegates. Why they didn't put it through in my case I can't say. I suppose they heard you coming. . . . But what on earth did they *mean* to do with me? Now, madame, we must promptly descend and make inquiries as to who was seen to leave your front door

just now. There is no time to be lost. . . . Only I feel so infernally giddy. . . ."

The inquiries he made resulted in little. Some standers-by had seen two men leave the house a few minutes since, but had observed nothing, neither what they were like nor where they went. No, it had not been observed that they were of South Irish aspect.

It seemed hopeless to track them. The old lady said that she lived there alone with her husband, above the shop ; but that, of course, any scoundrel might stray into it while the door stood open, and lurk in ambush.

"How did they guess that the old lady was going to invite me in?" Macdermott wondered. "If they did guess, that is, and if it was really part of the anti-delegate campaign. Of course, if not, they may merely have guessed she should ask some one (it may be her habit), and hidden in ambush to rob whoever it might be. But they didn't rob me. . . . It could be that this good old lady was in the plot herself, no less, for all she speaks so civil. But who

is to prove that, I ask you? It's queer and strange. . . ."

Thus pondering, Fergus Macdermott took a cab and drove to the hotel where he was to dine with Garth, the representative of the *Morning Post*. He would be doing Garth a good turn to let him get in with the tale before the other papers; he would be able to wire it home straight away. The *Morning Post* deserved that: a sound paper it was, and at times the only one in England that got hold of and stated the Truth. This attack on Macdermott proved conclusively to his mind, what he and the *Morning Post* had from the first suspected and said, that the Irish Republicans were at the back of the whole business, helped, as usual, by German and Bolshevik money.

"Ah, this proves it," said Macdermott, his blue eyes very bright in his white face as he drove along.

As to the procession, he had forgotten all about it.

31

Mademoiselle Bjornsen, substitute delegate for one of the Scandinavian countries, a doctor of medicine, and a woman of high purpose and degree, of the type which used to be called, in the old days when it flourished in Great Britain, *feminist*, often walked out in the evening for a purpose which did her great credit. She was of those good and disinterested women who care greatly for the troubles of their less fortunate, less well-educated and less well-principled sisters, and who often patrol streets in whatever city they happen to find themselves, with a view to extending the hand of succour to those of their sex who appear to be in error or in need.

On this evening of the 8th of September, Mlle. Bjornsen was starting out, after her dinner at the Hôtel Richemond, on her nightly patrol, when she was joined by Mlle. Binesco from Roumania, a lady whose rich and exuberant personality was not, perhaps, wholly in accord with her own

more austere temperament, but whom she acknowledged to abound in good intentions and sisterly pity for the unfortunate of her sex. For her part, Mlle. Binesco did not regard Mlle. Bjornsen as a very womanly woman, but respected her integrity and business-like methods, and felt her to be, perhaps, an effective foil to herself. It may be observed that there are in this world mental females, mental males, and mental neutrals. You may know them by their conversation. The mental females, or womanly women, are apt to talk about clothes, children, domestics, the prices of household commodities, love affairs, or personal gossip. Theirs is rather a difficult type of conversation to join in, as it is above one's head. Mental males, or manly men, talk about sport, finance, business, animals, crops, or how things are made. Theirs is also a difficult type of conversation to join in, being also above one's head. Male men as a rule, like female women, and vice versa; they do not converse, but each supplies the other with something they lack, so they gravitate together and make happy

marriages. In between these is the No-Man's Land, filled with mental neutrals of both sexes. They talk about all the other things, such as books, jokes, politics, love (as distinct from love affairs), people, places, religion (in which, though they talk more about it, they do not, as a rule, believe so unquestioningly as do the males and the females, who have never thought about it and are rather shocked if it is mentioned), plays, music, current fads and scandals, public persons and events, newspapers, life, and anything else which turns up. Their conversation is easy to join in, as it is not above one's head. They gravitate together, and often marry each other, and are very happy. If one of them makes a mistake and marries a mental male or a mental female, the marriage is not happy, for they demand conversation and interest in things in general, and are answered only by sex; they tell what they think is a funny story, and meet the absent eye and mechanical smile of one who is thinking how to turn a heel or a wheel, how to sew a frock or a field, how most cheaply to buy shoes or shares. And they

themselves are thought tiresome, queer, unsympathetic, unwomanly or unmanly, by the more fully sexed partner they have been betrayed by love's blindness into taking unto themselves.

This is one of life's more frequent tragedies, but had not affected either Mlle. Binesco, who was womanly, and had always married (so to speak) manly men, or Mlle. Bjornsen, who was neutral, and had not married any one, having been much too busy.

Anyhow, these two ladies were at one in their quest to-night. Both, whatever their minds might be like, had warm feminine hearts. Geneva, that godly Calvinist city, was a poor hunting-ground on the whole for them. But they turned their steps to the old *cité*, rightly believing that among those ancient and narrow streets vice might, if anywhere, flit by night.

"These wicked traffickers in human flesh and blood," observed Mlle. Binesco sighing (for she was rather stout), as they ascended the Rue de la Cité; "do not tell me they are not somehow behind the mysterious assaults on our unhappy comrades of the

League. Never tell me so, for I will not believe it."

"I will not tell you so," Mlle. Bjornsen, an accurate person, replied, "for I know nothing at all about it, nor does any one else. But to me it seems improbable. I sometimes think, mademoiselle, that there is some danger that the preoccupation which women like ourselves naturally feel with the suppression of this cruel trade and the rescue of its victims, may at times lead us into obsession or exaggeration. I try to guard myself against that. Moderation and exactitude are important."

"Ah, there speaks the north. For me, mademoiselle, I cannot be moderate; it is a quality alien to my perhaps over-impetuous temperament. I have never been cautious —neither in love, hate, nor in the taking of risks. You will realise, Mademoiselle, that the risk you and I are taking to-night is considerable. Have we not been warned not to penetrate into the more squalid parts of the city by night? And we are not only delegates, but women. At any moment we might be attacked and carried off to some

dwelling of infamy, there to wait deportation to another land."

"I do not expect it," replied the Scandinavian lady, who had a sense of humour.

A shrill giggle broke on their ears from a side street. Glancing down it, they saw a young girl, wearing like flags the paint and manner of her profession, and uttering at intervals its peculiar cry—that shrill, harsh laugh which had drawn the ladies' attention.

"Ah!" a coo of satisfaction came from Mlle. Binesco. "*Voilà une pauvre petite!*"

As the girl saw them, she darted away from them down the alley, obviously suspicious of their intentions. Quickly they followed; here, obviously, was a case for assistance and rescue.

The kind mouth of Mlle. Bjornsen set in determination; her intelligent eyes beamed behind their glasses.

The girl fluttered in front of them, still uttering the peculiar cry of her species, which to the good ladies was a desperate appeal for help, till she suddenly bolted beneath a low, dark archway.

The ladies hesitated. Then, "I must follow her, poor girl," Mlle. Bjornsen remarked simply, for the courage of a thousand Scandinavian heroes beat in her blood.

"And where you adventure, my dear friend," cried Mlle. Binesco, "I, a Roumanian woman and a friend of kings, will not be behind! We advance, then, in the name of humanity and of our unhappy sex!"

32

Humanity, compassion, womanly sympathy, and devotion to the cause of virtue—by these noble qualities these two poor ladies were lured to their fate. For it should be by now superfluous to say that, though they entered that archway, they did not emerge from it.

33

There also disappeared that night the good Albanian bishop, betrayed by who knew what of episcopal charity and response to appeals for succour from his fellow-countrymen, the helpless sheep of his flock, threatened by the wolfish atrocities of the ineffable Serb-Croat-Slovenes.

It did indeed seem that this unseen hand was taking the highest types of delegate for its purposes so mysterious and presumably so fell.

34

Every one turned next morning with interest to the day's issue of " Press Opinions " to discover what the world's newspapers were saying of the tragic and extraordinary state of affairs in Geneva. They were saying, it seemed, on the whole, very much what might be expected of them. The American press, for instance, observed that

the League, without the support of the United States, was obviously falling into the state of disruption and disintegration which had long since been prophesied. What was to be expected, when the Monroe Doctrine was being threatened continually by the bringing before the League of disputes between the South and Central American republics, disputes which, being purely American, could not possibly be settled by European intervention in any shape or form? On this question of the Monroe Doctrine, the security and utility of the whole League rested. . . . It was rumoured that it was the shaky attitude of the League on this point that was responsible for its present collapse. . . .

("Seems very like saying that America is behind the whole game," commented many readers.)

The French press commented on the fact that no one had yet dared to lay a hand on the French delegates. "Whatever," it said, "may be thought of the other delegates, the whole world has agreed to see in France a nation so strong, so beneficent, and so

humane, that it merits the confidence of humanity at large. Without it, no affairs could flourish. The tribute to the prestige of France evinced by this notable omission of assault cannot but be gratifying to all who love France. With the tragic disappearance of several English-speaking delegates, it might perhaps be natural to dispense with the tedious use of two languages where only one is necessary. No one listens to the interpretations into English of French speakers; the general chatter of voices and movement which immediately starts when the English interpreter begins, is surely sign enough of the general feeling on this point. . . ."

The more nationalist section of the Italian press—the *Popolo d'Italia*, for instance—prophesied, with tragic accuracy, that the Albanian delegate would very soon be among the victims of this criminal plot, in which it was not, surely, malicious to detect Yugo-Slav agency. It also spoke with admiration of the poet Dante.

The Swiss press, in much distress, urged the clearing up of this tragic mystery,

which so foully stained the records of the noble city of Geneva, so beautiful in structure, so chaste in habits, so idealistic in outlook, the centre of the intellectual thought of Europe, and, above all, so cheap to live in. For their part (so said *La Suisse*), they attributed these outrages to criminal agents from the hotels and shops of Brussels, Vienna, and other cities which might be mentioned, who had been sent to discredit Geneva as a safe and suitable home for the League. Fortunately, however, such discrediting was impossible: on the contrary, the cities discredited were the above-mentioned, which had hatched and put into execution such a wicked plot.

The extracts selected from the British press spoke with various voices. The *Morning Post* commented, without much distress, on the obvious disintegration and collapse of the League, which had always had within itself the seeds of ruin and now was meeting its expected Nemesis. Such preposterous houses of cards, said the *Morning Post*, cannot expect to last long in a world which is, in the main, a sensible place. It did not

now seem probable that, as some said, Bolshevists were behind these outrages ; on further consideration it was not even likely to be Irish traitors ; for these sections of the public would doubtless approve the League, typical as it was of the folly which so strongly actuated themselves. Far more likely was it that their assaults were the work, misguided but surely excusable, of the Plain Man, irritated at last to execute judgment on these frenzied and incompetent efforts after that unprofitable dream of the visionary, a world peace. It was well known that the question of disarmament was imminent. . . .

The *British Bolshevist* (its leader, not its correspondent, who seldom got quoted by the *Press Bulletin*) agreed with the *Morning Post* that the house of cards was collapsing because of its inherent vices, but was inclined to think that the special vice for which it was suffering retribution was its failure to deal faithfully with Article 18 of the Covenant, which concerned the publicity of treaties. The *British Bolshevist* always had Article 18 a good deal on its mind.

The *Times* said that these strange happenings showed the importance of keeping on frank and friendly terms (the *Times* often used these two incompatible adjectives as if they were synonymous) with France. They served to emphasise and confirm that *entente* of which the British people were resolved to suffer no infringement.

The *Daily News* thought that the enemies of disarmament and of the various humanitarian efforts of the League were responsible for these assaults.

The *Manchester Guardian* correspondent said that at last the Assembly, formerly a little dull, had taken on all the interest of a blood and thunder melodrama. . . .

35

The days went by, and the nights. Why dwell on them, or, in detail, on the strange —or rather the now familiar, but none the less sinister—events which marked each? One could tell of the disappearance, one after another, of the prominent members of

the Council—of the decoy of Signor Nelli, the chief Italian delegate, by messengers as from Fiume with strange rumours of Jugo-Slav misdeeds; of the sudden disappearance of Latin Americans from the Casino, whither they had gone to chat, to drink, and to play; of the silent stealing away of rows upon rows of Japanese, none knew how or why; of how Kristna, the distinguished Indian, was lured to meet a supposed revealer of a Ghandi anti-League plot.

As full-juiced apples, waxing over-mellow, drop in a silent autumn night, so dropped these unhappy persons, delegate by delegate, to their unguessed at doom. And it would indeed appear as if there were some carefully deliberated design against the welfare of the League, for gradually it appeared that those taken had, on the whole, this welfare more at heart than those left; their ideals were more pacific, their hearts more single, their minds more League.

The Turkish delegation, for example, did not disappear. Nor the Russian, nor the German, nor the Greek, nor the Serb-Croat-Slovene.

In the hands of those left, the Assembly and its committees were less dangerous to the wars of the world than they had been before. The best, from a League standpoint, were gone. What, for instance, would happen to the disarmament question should it be brought up, with the most ardent members of the disarmament committee thus removed from the scene? But, indeed, how could that or any other question be brought up, in the present state of agitation, when all minds were set on the one problem, on how to solve this appalling mystery that spread its tentacles further every day? The only committee which sat, or attempted any business, was Committee 9, on the Disappearance of Delegates—and that was signally impotent to do more than meet, pass resolutions, and report on unavailing measures taken.

The other committees, on humanitarian questions, on intellectual, financial, economic, political, and transit questions, were struck helpless. Not a frontier dispute, not an epidemic, not a drug, not so much as a White Slave, could be discussed. Truly the

very League itself seemed struck to the heart. All the Assembly could do was meet, vote, pass resolutions, and make speeches about the horrors of the next war and the necessity of thwarting the foul plot against the wellbeing of the League.

Meanwhile Central Europe rumbled, as usual, indeed as always, with disputes that might at any moment become blows. Affairs in Jugo-Slavia, in Hungary, in Greece, in Albania, in Czecho-Slovakia, in Poland, and in Russia, were not quiet. Greece and Turkey were hideously at war. Nor were the South and Central American republics free from unrest. Russia was reaching out its evil White hands to grasp and weld again into a vast unhappy whole its former constituent republics of Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Esthonia, Tauride, and White Russia. There seemed every chance that it would shortly succeed in doing so. The nations growled everywhere like sullen dogs on fragile chains. Never had the League of Nations, in all its brief career, been more necessary, never less available. Not a grievance could be given that public airing from

what is called a world platform, which is so beneficial to the airers, so apt at promoting fraternal feeling, so harmless to all concerned. Instead, grievances festered and went bad, and blood-poisoning was rapidly setting in. Not a voice could be raised, as many voices would have been raised, from that world-platform, to urge contending parties to refer their differences to the Court of International Justice, so ready and eager to adjudicate, to apply international conventions, whether general or particular, international custom as evidence for a general practice accepted as law, and teachings of the most highly qualified publicists as subsidiary means for the determination of rules of law. For all this is what these aged and wise judges sitting at the Hague were equipped and ready to do, if only the nations would ask them to do it. But it was not to be expected that the nations should make use of such a strange procedure for themselves, unless prompted and even urged thereto by the weight of opinion in the Assembly.

Yes, Europe, and indeed the world, was,

as always, in a parlous state, rushing on ruin with no hand raised to give it pause, even as in the evil old days before the conception and foundation of the League. The journalists were as busy as, and more profoundly happy than, they would have been had the Assembly been running its appointed course. They ran about picking up clues, Marconigraphing messages to their papers about the latest disappearances, the latest theories, the newest rumours. Each became a private detective, pursuing a lone trail. Other journalists flocked to the scene; where they had come in their tens, they now came in their hundreds, for here was News. The Assembly of the League of Nations is not News, until it stumbles on mystery and disaster, becoming material for a shocker. The meeting together of organisations for the betterment of the world is not News, in the sense that their failure is. Deeply Henry, going about his secret and private business, intent and absorbed, pondered this question of News, what it is and what it is not. Crime is News; divorce is News; girl mothers are News; fabric gloves and

dolls' eyes are, for some unaccountable reason, News; centenaries of famous men are, for some still stranger reason, News; railway accidents are News; the wrong-doing of clergymen is News; strangest of all, women are, inherently and with no activities on their part, News, in a way that men are not. Henry had often thought this very singular. He had read in accounts of public gatherings (such as criminal trials, tennis tournaments, boxing matches, etc.), such statements as "There were many well-dressed women present." These women had done nothing to deserve their fame; they were merely present, just as men were. But never had Henry read, "There were many well-dressed men present," for men were not News. To be News in oneself, without taking any preliminary action—that was very exciting for women. A further question arose: were women News to their own sex, or only to men? And were men perhaps News to women? "There were many well-dressed men present." . . . Ah, that would be exciting reading for women, and perhaps a woman reporter would thrill

to it and set it down. But men do not care how many men were present, or how well they were dressed, or what colour their hats and suits were. All sorts of articles and letters appear in the papers about women. Profound questions are raised concerning them. Should they smoke? Should they work? Vote? Take Orders? Marry? Exist? Are not their skirts too short, or their sleeves? Have they a sense of humour, of honour, of direction? Are spinsters superfluous? But how seldom similar inquiries are propounded about men. How few persons discuss superfluous bachelors, or whether the male arm or leg is an immodest sight, or whether men should vote. For men are not news.

Anyhow, thought Henry, anyhow delegates became News the moment they disappeared. If you do wrong you are News, and if you have a bad accident, you are News, but if you mysteriously disappear, you are doubly and trebly News. To be News once in one's life—that is something for a man. Though sometimes it comes too late to be enjoyed.

36

In and out of the maze of ancient streets that are Old Geneva, to and fro along the alleys that lead through balconied, leaning houses, up and down obscure and sudden flights of stone steps, Henry wandered under the September moon. All day he had, with the help of Charles Wilbraham's unwitting secretary, tracked Charles Wilbraham. He knew how Charles had begun the morning by dictating proud and ponderous documents in his proud and ponderous voice, and talking to people who came in and out of his room; how he had then gone to the Assembly Hall and chatted in the lobby to every one of sufficient importance to be worth his while, including ex-Cardinal Franchi, who had of late been making friends with him, and with whom he had dined last night at the Château Léman; how then Charles had lunched with two Russians, a Greek, and a Pole, and Sir John Levis, his father-in-law, at the Café du Nord, hatching Henry did not know what (for

the Nord was much too expensive for him) of anti-League mischief and crime; how after lunch Charles had attended the meetings of the sub-committees on the Disappearance of Delegates, going from one to another looking business-like and smug and as if he were at strictly private meetings, as indeed he was. Then up to his room for his tea (Charles never missed this meal) and down again to see how Sub-Committee 5 ("Consideration of Various Suspicions based on Reason and Common Sense") was getting on, and then up again to do some more work. (For there was this about Charles, as even Henry had to admit—he worked hard. Ambition, the last infirmity of noble minds, offensive and irritating quality as it is, has at least this one good fruit.) Then Charles had been to a large dinner given by the Canadian delegation to members of the Secretariat, and had made a facetious speech; and now, at eleven-thirty, he was walking about the old city, followed at some distance by Henry Beechtree.

Charles was not alone. He had with him M. Kratzky from Russia, Sir John Levis,

and a small, quiet Calvinist minister, whom Henry had lately seen about Geneva.

The four gentlemen turned out of the Rue du Perron down the narrow, ancient and curious Passage de Monnetier, and out of that into a deep arched alley running through a house into another street. Henry, watching from the corner of the Passage de Monnetier, did not dare to follow nearer for some moments. When he had given them a little time, he softly tiptoed to the mouth of the alley. It was one of those deep cobbled passages that run through many houses in the old quarter. It was profoundly dark; Henry could only faintly discern the three figures half-way down it. They seemed to have stopped, and to be bending down as if looking for something on the ground. The spark of an electric torch gleamed suddenly, directed by the little clergyman; its faint disc of light swam over the dirty floor of the passage, till it came to rest on an iron ring that lay flat to the ground. The clergyman seized this ring and jerked at it; after a moment it

left the ground in his hand, and with it the flap of a trap-door.

Whispers inaudible to Henry passed between the members of the party; then, one by one, the three figures descended through the open trap into the bowels of the earth, and the lid closed upon them.

Henry tiptoed forward; should he follow? On the whole—no. On the whole he would wait until Wilbraham, his father-in-law, M. Kratzky, and the clergyman emerged. What, after all, would be the use of finding oneself underground with desperate, detected criminals, whose habit it apparently was to stick at nothing? What, after all, could he do?

Henry was shivering, less from fear than excitement. Here, indeed, was a clue. Were they kept immured underground, these unfortunate captive delegates? And did Wilbraham and his criminal associates visit them from time to time with food and drink? Or without? With nothing, perhaps, but taunts? And how many more in Geneva knew of this trap-door and its secret? There were, every one knew, a

number of these old *trappons* in the city, leading usually to disused cellars; their presence excited no suspicion. Probably no one ever used the obscure and hidden trap in this dark alley.

It was queer, how sure Henry felt that this curious nocturnal expedition on the part of Charles, his father-in-law, M. Kratzky and the Calvinist pastor had to do with the mystery of the delegates. He knew it beyond a doubt. Nor was he surprised. It came as a consummation of his suspicion and his hopes. Of Charles Wilbraham's villainy he had long been all but sure; of the villainy of M. Kratzky all the world knew; of the villainy of an ammunitions knight and a Calvinist pastor there needed little to convince Henry. But he knew that he must make sure. He must not go to the police, or to the committee, with an unproved tale. He must wait and investigate and prove.

He waited, in the dark archway beneath the crazy jumble of houses, with the sudden voices and footfalls of the midnight city echoing from time to time in the dark streets

beyond. He waited and waited and waited. Now and then a dog or a cat rushed by him, startling him. Then, after twenty minutes or so, he wearied of waiting. Weariness and curiosity defeated caution; he pulled up the trap-door by its ring and peered down into blackness. Blackness, stillness, emptiness, and a queer, mouldy smell. Henry sat on the hole's edge for a full minute, dangling his legs. Then, catching his breath a little (it may or may not have been mentioned that Henry was not very brave), he swung himself down on to a hard, earthy floor.

It was a tunnel he was in; a passage about six feet high and four feet wide. How many feet or yards long was a more difficult and a much more interesting question. Feet? Yards? It might be miles. Henry's imagination bored through the impenetrable dark in front of the little moon thrown by his electric torch; through and along, through and along, towards what? The horrid four who had preceded him—where were they? Did they lurk, planning some evil, farther along the tunnel, just out

of earshot? Or had they emerged by some other exit? Or were they even now returning, to meet Henry in a moment face to face, to brush by him as he pressed against the damp brick wall, to turn on him suddenly that swimming moon of light . . . and then what?

Charles Wilbraham was no taker of human life, Henry felt assured. He was too prudent, too respectable, too much the civil servant. M. Kratzky, on the other hand, *was* a taker of human life—he did it as naturally as others would slay midges; while he breathed he slew. If Henry should be discovered spying, M. Kratzky's counsels would be all for making forthwith an end of Henry. Sir John Levis was an armament knight: members of the staff of the *British Bolshevist* needed not to know more of him than that: the Calvinist minister was either a Calvinist minister, and that was bad, or a master-criminal of the underworld disguised as a Calvinist minister, and that was worse. Or both of these. Four master-criminals of the underworld—these intriguing, appalling creatures, so common in the best fiction, so

rare even in the worst life—if one were to meet four of them together in a subterranean passage. . . . Could human flesh and nerves endure it?

Henry, with his shuddering dislike of seeing even a goldfish injured or slain, shrank far more shudderingly from being injured or slain himself. The horrid wrench that physical assault was—and then, perhaps, the sharp break with life, the plunge into a blank unknown—and never to see again on this earth the person whom one very greatly loved. . . .

As has been said, Henry was not brave. But he was, after all, a journalist on the scent of a story, and that takes one far; he was also a hunter in pursuit of a hated quarry, and that takes one farther.

Henry crossed himself, muttered a prayer and advanced down the passage, his torch a lantern before his feet, his nerves shivering like telegraph wires in a winter wind, but fortunately not making the same sound.

37

On and on and on. It was cold down there, like death, and bitter like death, and dark. Rats scuffled and leaped. Once Henry trod on one of them; it squeaked and fled, leaving him sick and cold. His imagination was held and haunted by the small quiet pastor; he seemed, on the whole, the worst of the four miscreants. A sinister air of deadly badness there had been about him. . . . Lines ran in and out of Henry's memory like cold mice. Something about "a grim Genevan minister walked by with anxious scowl." . . . Horrid. . . . It made you sweat to think of him. Then on the passage there opened another passage, running sharply into it from the right. That was odd. Which should be followed?

Henry swung his flashlight up each in turn, and both seemed the same narrow blackness. He advanced a few steps, and on his left yet another turning struck out from the main tunnel.

"My God," Henry reflected, "the place is a regular catacomb."

If one should lose oneself therein, one might wander for days, as one did in catacombs. . . . Having no tallow candle, but only an electric torch, one might eat one's boots . . . the very rats. . . .

Not repressing a shudder, Henry stood hesitating at the cross-roads, looking this way and that, his ears strained to listen for sounds.

And presently, turning a corner, he perceived that there were sounds—footsteps and low voices, advancing down the left-hand passage towards him. Quickly shutting his light, he stepped back till he came to the right-hand turning, and went a little way up it, to where it sharply bent. Just round the corner he stopped, and stood hidden. He was gambling on the chance that whoever was coming would advance, back or forward, along the main tunnel when they struck into it. If, on the other hand, they crossed this and turned up his passage, he could hastily recede before them until perhaps another turning came, or possibly some

exit, or until they turned on him that horrid moon of light and caught him. . . .

Well, life is a gamble at all times, and more particularly to those who play the spy.

Henry listened. The steps came nearer. They had a queer, hollow sound on the earthy floor. Low voices murmured.

It came to Henry suddenly that these were not the voices of Charles Wilbraham, of Sir John Levis, of M. Kratzky, or, presumably then, of the little pastor. These were voices more human, less deadly.

The footsteps reached the main passage, and then halted.

"Here's a puzzle," said a voice. "Which way, then? Will we divide, or take the one road?"

And then Henry, though he loved not Ulster, thanked God and came forward.

At the sound of his advance a flashlight was swung upon him, and the Ulster voice said, "Put them up!"

Henry put them up.

"It's all right, man. It's only Beechtree," said another voice, after a moment's

inspection, and Henry, though he loved not the *Morning Post*, blessed its correspondent.

"Good Lord, you're right. . . . What are you doing here, Beechtree? Is your paper in this damned Republican plot, as well as Sinn Fein, Bolsheviks, Germans, and the Pope? I wouldn't put it past the *British Bolshevist* to have a finger in it——"

"Indeed, no," said Henry. "You are quite mistaken, Macdermott. This plot is being run by armament profiteers, White Russia, and Protestant ministers. They're all down here doing it now. I am tracking them. And His Holiness, you remember, sent an encouraging message to the Assembly——"

"The sort of flummery he *would* encourage. . . . I beg your pardon, Beechtree. We will not discuss religion: not to-night. Time is short. How did *you* get into this rat-trap? And whom, precisely, are you tracking?"

"Through a *trappon* in an archway off the Passage de Monnetier. And I am tracking Wilbraham, Sir John Levis, M. Kratzky, and a Protestant clergyman, who all preceded

me through it. But I don't know in the least where they have got to. There are so many ramifications in this affair. I took it for a single tunnel, but it seems to be a regular system."

"It is," said Garth. "It extends on the other side of the water too. We got into it this evening through that house in the Place Cornavin where Macdermott was bilked by a Sinn Feiner."

"We had our suspicions of that house ever since," Macdermott went on; "so we went exploring this evening, and by the luck of God they'd gone out and left the door on the latch, so we slipped in and searched around, and found a trap-door in a cupboard—where they'd have shoved me down if they hadn't given up the idea half-way. It lets you down into a passage just like this, that runs down to the water and comes out in the courtyard of one of those tumble-down old pigeon-cotes by the Quai du Seujet. We came out there, and then tried over this side, through a trap by the Molard jetty I'd noticed before, and it led us here. There are dozens of these

trappons on both sides. Lots of them are inside houses. I always thought they led only to cellars. . . . As to your four chaps, wherever they've got to, no doubt they're exploring too. Wilbraham in a plot! Likely."

"It is," said Henry. "Very likely indeed. There are plenty of facts about Wilbraham you don't know. I've been finding them out for several years. I shall lay them before Committee 9 to-morrow."

The other two looked at him with the good-natured pity due to the correspondent of the *British Bolshevist*.

"Your lunatic paper has turned your brain, my son," Garth said.

"Well, let's be getting on," Macdermott impatiently urged. "Which way did your plotters take, Beechtree? We may as well be getting after them, anyhow."

"I don't know. I've lost them. I didn't follow at once, you see; I waited, thinking they would come out presently. When they didn't, I came down too. But by that time they'd got a long start. And, as there are other exits, they may have got out anywhere."

"Well, let's come along and look. We'll each take a different passage; we'll explore every avenue, like Cabinet Ministers. I'll go straight ahead; one of you two take that right-hand road, and the other the next turning, whenever it comes. We'll each get out where and how we can. Come on."

Garth turned up to the right. Henry went on with Macdermott for some way, till another turning branched off, running left.

"Ah, there's yours," said the Ulster delegate. "I shall keep straight on, whatever alluring avenues open on either side to tempt me. To-morrow (if we get out of this) we'll bring a gang of police down and do the thing thoroughly. Good luck, Beechtree. Don't scrag honest civil servants or good clergymen on sight. And don't let old Kratzky scrag you. Politically he's on the right side (that's why he'd want to scrag you, and quite right, too), but personally he's what you might call a trifle unprincipled, and that's why he'd do it as soon as look at you."

38

Henry walked alone again. The passage oozed water. The silence was chilly and deep. Against it and far above it, occasional sounds beat, as the world's sounds beat downwards into graves.

Geneva was amazing. How many people knew that it was under-run by this so intricate tunnel system? Did the town authorities know? Surely yes. And, knowing, had they not thought, when the recent troubles began, to explore these avenues? (How that horrid phrase always stuck in one's mind; one could not get away from it, as many a statesman, many an orator daily proved.) But possibly they had explored them with no result. Possibly Sub-section 4 (Organisation of Search) of Committee 9 knew all about them. What that sub-section did not yet know was that Charles Wilbraham, hand in glove with autocrat Russia, armament kings, and the Calvinist church, lurked and plotted in the avenues by night, like the spider in her web waiting for flies.

There were turnings here and there, to one side or the other, but Henry kept a straight course.

At last he was brought up sharp, nearly running his face into a rough clay wall, and above him he saw a trap-door. Here, then, was his exit. The door was only just above his head; he pushed at it with his hands; it gave not at all.

After all, one would expect a trap-door to be bolted. He wondered if it would be of any use to knock. Did it give on to a street, a courtyard, or a house?

He rapped on it with the end of his electric torch, softly and then loudly. He went on rapping, and knew the fear that assails the assaulter of impregnable, unyielding silence, the panic of him who calls aloud in an empty house and is answered only by the tiny sounds of creaking, scuffling, and whispering that cause the skin to creep, the blood to curdle, the marrow to freeze, the heart to stop, and the spirit to be poured out like water. Strange and horrid symptoms! Curdled blood, frozen marrow, unbeating heart . . . who first discovered that this

is what occurs to these organs when fear assaults the brain? Have physiologists said so, or is it a mere amateur guess at truth, another of the foolish things "they" say?

In these speculations Henry's mind engaged while he stood in the black bowels of the earth and beat for entry at the world's closed door.

At last he heard sounds as of advancing steps. Bolts were drawn heavily back; the trap-door was raised, and a face peered down; a brownish face with a small black moustache and a smooth skin stretched tightly over fat. A glimmer of light struggled with the darkness. "Chi c'è?" said a harsh voice, whispering.

"Sst! son'io." Henry thought this the best answer. His nerves had relaxed on hearing the Italian language, a tongue not spoken habitually by Wilbraham, M. Kratzky, Sir John Levis, or Calvinist pastors. It is a reassuring tongue; one feels, but how erroneously, that those speaking it cannot be very far out of the path of human goodness. And to Henry it was partly native. The

very sight of the plump, smooth, Italian face made him feel at ease.

The face peered down into the darkness, and a stump of candle burning in a saucer threw a wavering beam on to Henry's face looking up.

"Già," the voice assented to Henry's rather obvious statement. "Voul scendere, forse?"

Henry said he did, and a stool was handed down to him. In another minute he stood on the stone floor of a largish cellar, almost completely blocked with casks and wood stacks. From it steps ran up to another floor.

The owner of the plump Italian face had a small plump figure clad in shirt, trousers, and slippers. His bright dark eyes stared at his visitor, heavy with sleep. He had obviously been roused from bed. Surprise, however, he did not show; probably he was used to it.

He talked to Henry in Italian.

"You roused me from sleep. You have a message, perhaps? You wish something done?"

Henry, not knowing whether this Italian

Swiss knew more than he ought to know, or whether he was merely assisting the police investigations, answered warily, "No message. But I have been down there on the business, and had to return this way. I must now go as quickly as possible in to the town."

He added, at a venture, glancing sideways at the other, "Signor Wilbraham was down there with his colleagues."

The man started, and the saucer wavered in his hand. Signor Wilbraham was obviously either to him a suspect name, or else his master and leader in intrigue. He was frightened of Wilbraham.

"Where is he now?" he asked. "Will he come here?"

"I think not. Be at ease. He has disappeared in another direction. Have the kindness to show me the way out."

The man led the way to the steps and up them, into a tiny ground-floor bedroom, and through that into a passage. As he unbolted a side door, Henry said to him, "You know something about Signor Wilbraham, then?"

The plump little figure shrugged.

"A good deal too much, certainly."

"Good," said Henry. "Later you shall tell what you know. Don't be afraid. He can't hurt you."

As to that the raised eyebrows showed doubt. Wilbraham, it was apparent, inspired a deep mistrust. The fat little man was shivering, either from fear or cold or thwarted sleep, as he opened the door for Henry to pass out.

"The will of God will be done," was what he regretfully said, "unless his dear Mother can by any means avert it. For me, I escape, if necessary, where they cannot find me. Good-night, Signore."

He shut the door softly behind Henry, who found himself outside a block of old houses at the lake end of the Rue Muzy, under a setting moon, as the city clocks struck two. The night, which had seemed to Henry already so long, was yet, as nights of action go, young.

Henry, as he walked homewards by the lake's edge, wondered where and in what manner Macdermott and Garth had

emerged, or would emerge, to the earth's face.

The earth's face! Never, on any of the lovely nights in that most lovely place, had it seemed to Henry fairer than it seemed this night, as he walked along the Quai des Eaux Vives, the clean, cool air filling his lungs and gently fanning his damp forehead, the dark and shining water lapping softly against its stone bounds. How far better was the earth's face than its inside!

Henry, tired and chilled, had now no thought but sleep. To-morrow early he would go to the President of Committee 9 with his report. Also he would wire the story early to his paper. As he lay in bed, too much excited, after all, to sleep (for Henry suffered from nervous excitement in excess) he composed his press story. Anti-disarmament, anti-peace fiends, plotting with Russian Monarchists to wreck the League . . . all this had the *British Bolshevist* many a time suggested, but now it could speak with no uncertain voice. Names might even be given. . . . Then, in the evening, when the police had explored the avenues,

investigated the mystery, and proved the facts, a second telegram, more detailed, could be despatched. What a scoop ! After all, thought Henry, tossing wakeful and wide-eyed in the warm dawn, after all he was proving himself a good journalist. No one could say after this that he was not a good journalist.

39

M. Fernandez Croza, delegate from Paraguay, and President of the Committee on the Disappearance of Delegates, sat after breakfast with his private secretary and his stenographer in his sitting-room at the Hotel des Bergues, dictating a speech he meant to deliver at that morning's session of the Assembly on the beauties of a world peace. It was a very creditable and noble speech, and he meant to deliver it in Spanish, as a protest, though his English and French were faultless.

M. Croza was a graceful person, young for a delegate, slightly built, aquiline, brown skinned, black haired, shaved clean in the

English and American manner, which Latins seldom use, and which he had picked up, among other things, in the course of an Oxford education. The private secretary and the stenographer were a swarthy young man and woman with full lips and small moustaches.

M. Croza was clever, determined, and patriotic; he believed firmly in the future of the Latin American republics, and particularly in that of Paraguay; in the necessity of imbuing into the staff of the League of Nations more Latin American blood, and in the desirability of making Spanish a third official language in the Assembly. He disliked the Secretariat as at present constituted, thinking it European, narrow, and conceited, and he could, when orating on topics less noble and more imminent than a world peace, make a very relevant and acute speech.

To him, already thus busy at ten o'clock in the morning, entered a hotel messenger with a card bearing the name of the correspondent of the *British Bolshevist*, and the words "Urgent and private business."

"I suppose he wants a statement on the Paraguay attitude towards Argentine meat," M. Croza commented. "I had better see him."

He turned to his stenographer, and said (in Spanish, in which tongue, it may be observed, it sounded even better than in the English rendering): "And so the gentle doves of peace comma pursued down stormy skies by the hawks of war comma shall find at length . . . shall find at length. . . . Alvarez, please finish that sentence later on. That will do for the present, señorita. . . . Admit Mr. Beechtree, messenger."

Mr. Beechtree was admitted. The slim, pale, shabby and yet somehow elegant young man, with his monocle, so useless, so foppish, dangling on its black ribbon, pleased, on the whole, M. Croza's fastidious taste.

After introductions, courtesies, apologies, and seatings, Mr. Beechtree got to business.

"I have," he began, in his soft, light, tired voice, "a curious story to tell. I am in a position, after much search, to throw a good deal of light on the recent mysterious

disappearances. I have evidence of a very serious nature indeed. . . ."

M. Croza, in his capacity of President of Committee 9, had become used to such evidence of late. But he always welcomed it, and did so now, with an encouraging nod.

Perhaps the nod, though encouraging, had an air of habit, for Mr. Beechtree added quickly, "What I have to tell you is most unusual. It implicates persons not usually implicated. Indeed, never before. I am not here to hurl random accusations against persons for whom I happen to feel a distaste. I am here with solid, documentary evidence. I have it in this case." He opened his shabby dispatch case, and showed it full of papers.

"It implicates," he continued, "an individual who holds a distinguished position on the staff of the Secretariat."

M. Croza leant forward, interested, stimulated, not displeased.

"You amaze me," he said. "Take a note, Alvarez, if you please."

"Some years ago," said Henry, gratified

by the delegate's attention and the secretary's poised pencil, " before the League of Nations, so-called——"

" It *is* the League of Nations," said the delegate, with a little frown.

" To be sure it is," Henry recollected himself. He had merely used " so-called " as a term indicative of contempt, like " sic," forgetting that he was not addressing the readers of the *British Bolshevist*. " Well, before the League of Nations existed—to be exact, in the year 1919—I had occasion, by chance, to discover some things about this individual. I learnt that his wife was the daughter of an armaments knight, and that he himself had a great deal of money in the business. There was no great harm in this, from his point of view ; he never, in those days, professed to be a pacifist, for, though he wielded throughout the war a pen in preference to a sword, he truly believed it to be mightier ; he was, in fact, in the Ministry of Information. He was not inconsistent in those days, though he was, I imagine, never easy in his mind about this money he had, and held his shares under

his wife's name only. But when the League Secretariat was formed, he was one of the first to receive an appointment on it. It was not generally known where he got his income from, and he found himself in a prominent position on the staff of a League, one of whose objects, if only one among many, is to end war. So there he was, his fortune dependent on the continuation of the very thing he was officially working to suppress. It wasn't to be expected that he should be pleased at the prospect of the disarmament question coming up before the Assembly; or at the prospect of the various disputes going on now in the world being discussed in the Assembly and referred to judicial arbitration. Much better for him if the rumours and threats of war should continue."

"Continue," stated the delegate, "they always will. That, Mr. Beechtree, we may take as certain, in this imperfect world. Yes. . . . He's an Englishman, I assume, this friend of yours?"

"An Englishman, yes. Intensely an Englishman." Henry paused a moment.

"I had better tell you at once; he is Charles Wilbraham."

"Wilbraham!" M. Croza was startled. He felt no love for Wilbraham, who, for his part, felt and showed little for the Latin American republics. M. Croza bitterly remembered various sneers which had been repeated to him. . . . Besides, it was Wilbraham who had cast suspicion on Paraguay. Further, he had been at Oxford with Wilbraham, and had disliked him there.

"Go on, sir," he said gravely and yet ardently.

"So," said Henry, "Wilbraham hatches a scheme. Or, possibly it is hatched by his father-in-law, Sir John Levis (he's one of the directors of Pottle & Kett's, the great armament firm), and Wilbraham is persuaded to carry it out; it doesn't matter which. Levis has been in Geneva now for some days. He has lain rather low and has not been staying at Wilbraham's house, but I've evidence from his secretary that they have been constantly together. They cast around to find convenient colleagues, unscrupulous enough to do desperate things, and with

their own reasons for wishing to nullify the work of the League and to hold up discussion of international affairs while disturbances come to a head."

"Such colleagues," mused M. Croza, "would not be hard to find."

"Whom do they pitch on? There are a number of possibly suitable helpers, and I can't say how many of them are involved. But what I have evidence of is that they brought in the Russian delegate to their councils—Kratzky, who is a byword even among Russians for sticking at nothing. If Kratzky could stave off discussion of European politics and paralyse the Assembly until Russia should be ready and able to pounce on and hold by force the new Russian republics—well, naturally monarchist Russia would be pleased. I have evidence that Wilbraham and Levis have been continually meeting and conferring with Kratzky since the Assembly began. Kratzky, that bloody butcher. . . ."

M. Croza, whose sympathy was all with small republics against major powers, agreed about Kratzky.

"You haven't," he suggested, "notes of what has actually passed between Wilbraham and Kratzky on the subject?"

"I regret that I have not. I could never get near enough. . . . But I have evidence of continual meetings, continual lunches and conferences. This I have obtained from Wilbraham's secretary. She has to keep his engagements for him. I have obtained possession of the little pocket-book in which she notes them. I have it here. See: 'Saturday, Lunch, Café du Nord, Kratzky and Sir John. Sunday, Up Salève, with Kratzky. Monday, 8 a.m., Bathe, Kra——" No, that can't be Kratzky; he wouldn't bathe; that must be some one else. And so on, and so on. Now, I ask you, what would one talk about to Kratzky all that time except some iniquitous intrigue? It's all Kratzky knows about. So, you see, when I began to suspect all this, I took to tracking Wilbraham, following him about. It's been, I can tell you, a most tiring job. Wilbraham is such a very tedious man. A most frightful bore. His very voice makes me sick. . . . But I followed him. I tracked

him. All over the shop I tracked him. And last night he trapesed round the town with Levis and Kratzky and a horrid little Calvinist clergyman who must be in it too. I hate Calvinists, don't you?"

"Intolerable persons," agreed the delegate from Paraguay.

"Well, at last they hared down a trap-door in an archway into the bowels of the earth. I saw them into it. After some time I went down too. I couldn't find them, but I found an extraordinary system of tunnelling—a regular catacomb. You get in and out of it all over the town, through *trappons*, mostly in old houses, I think. I didn't discover where half the tunnels ended. But obviously Wilbraham and his friends know all about it. And that's what they've done with the delegates. Either hidden them somewhere alive down there, or killed them. When Kratzky's in an affair, the people up against him don't, as a rule, come out alive. . . . I don't know how much the police know about this tunnel business, but they must make a complete investigation, of course."

"Obviously, without delay. . . . A singular story, Mr. Beechtree; very singular."

"Life is singular," said Henry.

"There you are very right." . . . But M. Croza, used to the political life of South American republics, found no stories of plots and intrigues really singular. "You have reason," he added, to think badly of Mr. Wilbraham, I infer?"

"Grave reasons. I know him for a very ugly character. It is high time he was exposed."

M. Croza thought so too. As has been said, he did not care for Charles Wilbraham. And what a counter-charge to Wilbraham's accusations again the residents at the Hotel des Bergues!

"One of these Catholic converts," he reflectively commented. "I do not like them. To be born a Catholic, that is one thing, and who can help it? After all, it is the true faith. To become a Catholic—that is quite another thing, and seems to us in Paraguay to denote either feebleness of intellect or a dishonest mind. In a man, that is. Women, of course, are different.

not having intellect, and being naturally *dévotes*. So, anyhow, we believe in Paraguay. But perhaps one is unfair."

"It is difficult not to be unfair to these," Henry agreed. "But it is more than difficult, it is impossible, to be unfair to Wilbraham. Nothing we think or say of him can be in excess of the truth. Such is Wilbraham. He always has been. . . . Now, if you will, sir, I will show you the documents I have with me which corroborate my story."

The delegate beckoned to his secretary.

"Go through Mr. Beechtree's papers, Alvarez. I must be getting to the Assembly. It is past the hour. . . . At this afternoon's meeting of Committee 9, Mr. Beechtree, I will lay these suggestions of yours before my colleagues, and we will consider what action shall be taken. You will be present. Meanwhile, Alvarez, have orders taken to the police to explore the subterranean passages. Mr. Beechtree, you will be able to direct them to the means of entry, will you not."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Henry, "if they are being explored. Macdermott, from

Ulster, and Garth of the *Morning Post*, were down there last night. I don't know if they ever got out or not, but if they did they'll be doing something about it this morning. They take a different view from mine, I may say. Macdermott suspects Sinn Feiners (Ulster has only one idea, you know), and Garth agrees with him, but adds Bolsheviks and Germans. Neither of them would suspect either Wilbraham or Kratzky without absolute proof. They do not like Wilbraham. No one does. But they are obsessed with their pet ideas."

"To every man his own scapegoat; it's the law of life. Now, Mr. Beechtree, I must leave you. We meet again at three o'clock. Here is a card of entry to the committee meeting. Till then I shall say nothing to any one. I will lay your story before the committee for what it is worth, but I do not, you must remember, commit myself to it. It is merely a basis for inquiry, and the committee shall undoubtedly have the facts before them. But care and discretion are advisable. . . . Your paper, I think, is not celebrated for its love either for the

League of Nations and its Secretariat, or of monarchist Russia, or of armament princes? We must be prepared for the imputation to you of prejudice."

"It would be," Henry admitted, "not unjustified. My paper is prejudiced. So am I. To be prejudiced is the privilege of the thinking human being. After all, we are not animals, to judge everything by its smell and taste as it comes before us, irrespective of preconceived theories. The open mind is the empty mind. The pre-judgment is often the deliberate and considered judgment, based on reason, whereas the post-judgment is a hasty makeshift affair, based on the impressions of the moment. Fortunately, however, the two are apt, in the same mind, to concur——"

"Quite so, quite so." M. Croza, who was in a hurry, nodded affably but decidedly, and Henry, who was apt, in the interests of discussion, to forget himself, left him.

40

Henry despatched straightway a long message to the *British Bolshevist*, guarded in language but sinister in implication, and hinting that further developments and more definite revelations were imminent. In the journalists' lobby he encountered Garth, who had also been sending a message.

"Oh, hallo," said Garth, "so you got out all right. So did Macdermott. I had the devil of a time. I tried one exit that didn't work; must have been bolted on the outside, I suppose. Anyhow, I hammered away and nothing happened. Then I struck another avenue and came to another trap which gave after mighty efforts on my part, and I came up into that book-shop which Burnley disappeared into, and which told the police so firmly that he left again in a few minutes. The trap was hidden away under the counter. I didn't stop; I thought it probably wasn't healthy, so I unbolted the front door and crept off home to bed. First thing this morning I

put the police on the track, and they're getting busy now asking the bookseller questions and sending gangs to work the catacombs. One thing I've discovered ; that book-shop is a meeting-place for Bolshie refugees and German anarchists. They meet in the old chap's back parlour and do their plotting there and send gold to the trade-unions."

"How do you know?" Henry asked, interested.

"Well, it's quite obvious. Too busy to go into the evidence now. I must look in at the Assembly and see what's doing. . . ."

Henry perceived that the correspondent of the *Morning Post* was actuated, in the matter of Bolshevists, Germans, trade-unions, and gold, rather by a deliberate and considered pre-judgment than by the hasty and makeshift impressions of the moment, or, anyhow, that the two had in his mind concurred. He asked after Macdermott.

"Oh, Macdermott found Sinn Fein plots all over the place. He had a hair-raising time. He went miles and miles, he says,

and came up at last against a wall. There was no trap-door : it was merely a cul-de-sac. So he retraced his steps and took a by-path, and emerged finally in a brothel close to the cathedral. Of course, the advantage of a brothel is that it's alive and humming even at dead of night ; anyhow it was morning by that time, so he had no difficulty in making himself heard. He couldn't get anything out of the people; they were German Swiss, and pretended to be merely stupid. But they're being sorted by the police this morning."

" And where do the Sinn Feiners come in ? "

" Oh, I don't know. They meet there to plot, Macdermott said. Together with Germans. Probably they've a bomb-cache in the tunnels too. He told O'Shane about it, and O'Shane said republicans would never make use of a disorderly house, not even for the best patriotic purposes. He's rather sick that he wasn't on to this catacombs business too ; he'd have found Orange plots down there. I left them at it. . . . What's going on within, Jefferson ? "

"That damned little Greek holding forth on the importance of disarming Turkey. We've just had Paraguay on the beauties of a world peace and the peaceful influence of the South American republics."

"Well," said Garth, "I shall go in and hear the Greek. He always makes things hum."

Henry, too, went in and heard the Greek, whose manner of oratory he enjoyed.

41

Committee 9 met at three o'clock in the spacious and sunny saloon known as Committee Room C. The only portion of the public admitted was the correspondent of the *British Bolshevist*, who sat behind the President's chair with a portfolio full of papers, looking pale, shabby, and tired, but exalted, like one whose great moment is at hand.

After the minutes of the last meeting had been read, the President rose to address the committee, in French. He had, he said,

some fresh and important facts to communicate. A quite new line of inquiry had that day been suggested to him by one who had for some time been secretly pursuing investigations. The facts revealed were so startling, so amazing, that very substantial evidence would be necessary to persuade committee members of their truth. It could at present be only a tentative theory that was set before the committee ; but let the committee remember that *magna est veritas et prevalebit* ; that they were there to fulfil a great duty, and not to be deterred by any fears, any reluctances, any personal friendships, any dread of scandal, from seeking to draw out truth from her well. He asked his colleagues to listen while he told them a strange story.

The story, as he told it, gained from his more important presence, his more eloquent and yet more impartial manner, a plausibility which Henry's had lacked. His very air, of one making a painful and tentative revelation, was better than Henry's rather shrill eagerness. Every now and then he paused and waved his hand at Henry sitting behind

him, and said, "My friend Mr. Beechtree here has documentary evidence of this, which I will lay before the committee shortly." When, after long working up to it, he gave the suspected member of the Secretariat the name of Wilbraham, it fell on the tense attention of the whole table. Henry, looking up to watch its reception, saw surprise on many faces, incredulity on several, pleasure on more, amusement on a few. He met also the blue eyes of Mr. Macdermott fixed on him with a smile of cynical admiration. Macdermott would doubtless have something to say when the President had done. But what he was now thinking was that the correspondent of the *British Bolshevist* had more journalistic gifts than one would have given him credit for.

"Where, you may demand of me," proceeded the President, "is M. Wilbraham now? That I cannot tell you. He entered this system of secret passages last night in company with those who are suspected by Mr. Beechtree of being his fellow conspirators, and he has not been seen since. Have they, possibly, escaped, their evil work

done? Whither have they gone? Who was that Protestant pastor? What doings, gentlemen, engage the attentions of M. Kratzky of Russia, that enemy of small republics, Sir John Levis of Pottle and Kett, that enemy of peace, a *soi-disant* Protestant pastor, the presumed enemy of true religion, and M. Wilbraham of the Secretariat? Mind, gentlemen, I impute nothing. I merely inquire."

A murmur of applause broke from the Latin Americans. As it died down, Henry, looking up, saw standing by the door Charles Wilbraham, cool, immaculate, attentive, and unperturbed, and the *soi-disant* Protestant pastor at his elbow.

42

Henry allowed himself a smile. Here, then, arrived after all the years of waiting, was the hour. The hour of reckoning; the hour in which he, brought face to face with Charles Wilbraham, should expose him before men for what he was. The hour

when Charles Wilbraham should face him, reduced at last to impotent silence, deflated to limp nothingness like a gas balloon, and find no word of defence. Shamed and dishonoured, he would slink away, at long last in the wrong. In the wrong himself, after all these years of putting others there. Truly, Henry's hour had arrived.

The President, too, had seen the newcomers now. He paused in his speaking; he was for a moment at a loss. Then, "Gentlemen, excuse me, but this is a strictly private session," he said clearly across the large room, in his faultless Oxford English.

Charles Wilbraham bowed slightly and advanced.

"Forgive me, sir, but I have a card of admittance. Also for my friend here, Signor Angelo Cristofero."

"Angelo Cristofero"—the name seemed to ripple over a section of the committee like a wind on waters.

"Who is he?" asked Henry, of an Italian Swiss, and the answer came pat.

"The greatest detective at present alive. An Italian, but at home in all countries, all

languages, and all disguises. Really a marvellous genius. Nothing balks him."

"We have, you see," continued Wilbraham, in his disagreeable, sneering voice, "some rather important information to communicate to the committee, if you will pardon the interruption. Presently I will ask Signor Cristofero to communicate it. But for the moment might I be allowed to ask for a little personal explanation? Since I entered the room I heard a remark or two relating to myself and various friends of mine which struck me as somewhat strange. . . ."

M. Croza courteously bowed to him, with hostile eyes.

"You have a right to an explanation, sir. As you have entered at what I can but call such a very inopportune moment, you heard what I was saying—words uttered, need I say, in no malicious spirit, but in a sincere and public-spirited desire to discover the truth. I was accusing and do accuse, no one; I was merely laying before the committee information communicated to me this morning by Mr. Henry Beechtree."

"Mr. Henry Beechtree?"

Charles Wilbraham turned on this gentleman the indifferent and contemptuous regard with which one might look at and dismiss some small and irrelevant insect.

"And who, if I may ask, is Mr Henry Beechtree?"

"The correspondent, sir, of one of the newspapers of your country—the *British Bolshevist*."

Charles laughed. "Indeed? Hardly, perhaps, an organ which commands much influence. However, by all means let me hear Mr. Beechtree's information. I am, I infer, from what I overheard, engaged in some kind of conspiracy, together with my friends M. Kratzky, Sir John Levis, and this gentleman here. May I know further details, or are they for the private edification of the committee only?"

Charles heavily sarcastic, ponderously ironic—how well Henry remembered it.

"Are we," he went on, "supposed to have spirited away, or even murdered, the missing delegates, may I ask?"

"That," said M. Croza politely, "was Mr. Beechtree's suggestion—only, of course,

a suggestion, based on various facts which had come to his knowledge. You can, doubtless, disprove these facts, sir, or account for them in some other way. No one will be more delighted than the committee over which I preside."

"Might I hear these sinister facts?" Charles was getting smoother, more unctuous, more happy, all the time. It was the little curl of his lip, so hateful, so familiar, with which he said these words, which seemed to snap something in Henry's brain. He pushed back his chair and sprang to his feet, breathless and dizzy and hot. He regarded not the cries of "Order," from the chair and the table; order or not, he must speak now to Charles.

"You shall hear them, sir," he said, and his voice rang shrilly up and up to a high and quivering note. "There is one, at least which you will not be able to deny. That is that you have shares, large and numerous, in the armaments firm of Pottle and Kett, of which Sir John Levis, your father-in-law, is chief director."

Charles fixed on him a surprised stare.

He put on his pince-nez, the better to look.

"I do not think," he said, in his calm, smooth voice, "that I am called upon to discuss with you the sources of my income. In fact, I'm afraid I don't quite see how you come into this affair at all—er—Mr. Beechtree. But, since your statement has been made in public, perhaps I may inform the committee that it is wholly erroneous. I had once such shares as this—er—gentleman mentioned. It ought to be unnecessary to inform this committee that I sold them all on my appointment to the Secretariat of the League, since to hold them would, I thought, be obviously inconsistent with League principles. If it interests the committee to know, such money that I possess is now mostly in beer. Mr.—er—Beechtree's information, Mr. President, is just a little behind the times. Such a stirring organ as the *British Bolshevist* should, perhaps, have a more up-to-date correspondent. Will you, Mr. President, request Mr. Beechtree to be seated? I fear I find myself unable to discuss my affairs with—er—him personally."

Charles's eyes, staring at Henry through his pince-nez, became like blue glass. For a moment silence held the room. Henry flushed, paled, wilted, wavered as he stood. Thrusting desperately his monocle into his eye, he strove to return stare for stare. After a moment Charles's high complacent laugh sounded disagreeably. He had made quite sure.

"How do you do, Miss Montana? We haven't, I think, met since January, 1919." He turned to the puzzled committee. "Miss Montana, a former lady secretary of mine in the Ministry of Information, Mr. President. Dismissed by me for incompetence. What she is doing here in this disguise I do not know; that is between her and the newspaper which, so she says, employs her. May Signor Cristofero now be permitted to lay his rather important information before the committee? We waste time, and time is precious at this juncture."

43

The situation was of an unprecedented unusualness. The President of Committee 9 hardly knew how to deal with it. All eyes gazed at Henry, who said quietly, "That is a damned lie," felt giddy, and sat down, leaning back in his chair and turning paler. The monocle dropped from his eye and hung limply from its ribbon. Henry literally could not, after his tiring night, his exhausting day, the emotional strain of the last hour, stand up to Charles Wilbraham any more. If he could have a dose of sal volatile—a cocktail—anything . . . as it was, he wilted, all but crumpled up; all he was able for was to sit, as composed as might be, under a deadly fire of eyes.

The pause was ended by Fergus Macdermott, who heaved largely from his chair and remarked, "I would like to second Mr. Wilbraham's suggestion that we will hear Mr. Cristofero's communication. May I also suggest that the income of Mr. Wilbraham is between himself and his bankers,

and the sex of Mr. Beechtree between him and his God, and that both are irrelevant to the business before this committee and need not be discussed." The committee applauded this, though they felt a keen interest in both the irrelevant topics. The President called on Signor Cristofero to address the committee, and beckoned Mr. Wilbraham to a chair.

The little *soi-disant* pastor stepped forward. He was a spare, small, elderly man, with a white face and gentian-blue eyes and a mouth that could make up as anything. During the last few days it had been a prim and rather smug button. Now it had relaxed in shrewder, wider lines. He showed to Committee 9 the face not of the Calvinist pastor but of the great detective. He spoke the Italian of the Lombardy Alps, the French of Marseilles, the English of New York, the German of Alsace, the Russian of Odessa, the Yiddish of the Roman Ghetto, the Serbian of Dalmatia, the Turkish of the Levant, the Greek of the Dodacenese, and many other of the world's useful tongues. He addressed the committee in French,

speaking rapidly and clearly, illustrating his story with those gestures of the hands which in reality (though it is not commonly admitted) make nothing clearer, but are merely a luxury indulged in by speakers, who thus elucidate and emphasise their meaning to themselves and to no one else. However, Signor Cristofero's words were so admirably clear that his confusing gestures did not matter.

He had, so he said, been sent for three weeks ago from New York, where he had been engaged on a piece of work which he had just concluded, by Mr. Charles Wilbraham, who had requested him to come immediately to Geneva and investigate this strange matter of the disappearing delegates. He had not known Mr. Wilbraham, but he had recognised the importance of this matter. He had arrived incognito, assumed the costume in which they now saw him, which is one the least calculated to arouse suspicion in Geneva, and set to work. After careful secret inquiries and investigations, he had found that the suspicions he had had from the outset were confirmed. He had

long known of a secret society which was at work to wreck the League of Nations. Its activities were so multifarious, so skilful, so obscure, and often so entirely legitimate, that it was impossible to check them. The society had its agents all over the world, in all countries. Some were paid, others worked out of good will. This society objected to the League partly because it was afraid of the decrease of armaments, and ultimately of wars. Unlikely as this prospect sounded, the society was taking no chances. Among its members were the directors of armament firms, inventors, professional soldiers of high rank, War Office officials, those who hoped to get some advantage for themselves or their countries out of wars, and those who genuinely thought the League a dangerous and foolish thing calculated to upset the peace of the world. Many of its members also objected to the League on all kinds of other grounds, disliking its humanitarian enterprises, its interference with nefarious traffickings, such as those in women, opium, and cocaine. Powerful patent medicine manufacturers were exasperated by its anti-epidemic efforts ;

many great financiers objected to the way it spent its money ; some great powers thought they would be freer in their dealings with smaller powers without it. And so on and so forth. All over the world, in every department of life, there were to be found those who, for one reason or another, rightly or wrongly, reasonably or unreasonably, objected to the League. And so this society had been formed. It collected its agents as it could, and employed them as occasion served. It was considered by the society specially important to prevent the success of this present session of the Assembly, which had a large and varied agenda before it, including the renewed discussion of the reduction of armaments, which was, it was believed, to be pressed with great earnestness by certain delegates, so that some issue could scarcely be evaded. Besides which, the society had come to the conclusion that to make, once, a complete fool of the League Assembly and Council before the world, so that its constitution would be disintegrated and its achievements would be as dust before the wind, would

deal the prestige of the League such a heavy blow as permanently to discredit it. To this end, after much cogitation, the society had got hold of a very brilliant and accomplished agent indeed ; an agent who cared not what he did nor for what side he fought, so long as he was largely enough paid. To him, to this unscrupulous and able man, the society had said, " Hold up and discredit the coming Assembly somehow. The method we leave to you. You have *carte blanche* in the matter of money, and you shall be paid an immense sum for success."

" This man," said Signor Cristofero, " undertook the mission. With unparalleled skill, scheming and ingenuity, he decoyed and entrapped member after member of the Assembly, luring each one by some suitable bait to some spot where there was a trap-door giving on to the system of underground passages which runs, as is well known to the authorities, beneath part of Geneva. What the authorities did *not* know, is the number of trap-door entries to these passages, and where they ultimately lead. I have been exploring them now for

some days. Last night I conducted Mr. Wilbraham through them, together with his friends M. Kratzky and Sir John Levis. At a certain point in one of the tunnels one appears to come up against an earth wall; it seems to be a cul-de-sac. I made the discovery that it is not a cul-de-sac. The earth wall is a skilful disguise; it swings back, and the passage continues. It continues, gentlemen, on and on, far outside the city, running beside the lake, till it ends at last in a cellar. What cellar, you demand? Gentlemen, it is the cellar of a château two miles up the lake. A large and ancient château, inhabited by a former cardinal of the church. He was retired from this office some years ago; he said and says it was for heretical opinions expressed in books. In reality it was less for this (though this too had its influence in the decision of the Church) than for a plethora of wives. The wives without the heresies might have been winked at, for the Church has a wise blind side and knows that its children are but dust; even (though this is less probable) the heresies without the

wives might have been ignored ; but the combination was excessive. The cardinal had to go. Since then he has been living in this château, writing vast and abstruse works on theology and enjoying the loveliness of the scenery, the beauty of his house and garden, the amenities of such witty and scholarly society as he could collect around him, and the companionship of a lady whom he inaccurately calls his niece. His name—gentlemen, you many of you know it and him—is Franchi, Dr. Silvio Franchi. Here, indeed, was a sharp tool ready to the hands of our society. They send for him ; he accepts the commission ; he conceives the ingenious scheme of secretly extending the underground tunnels to his château and adding trap-door entries to them in houses and courtyards where he could command the services of the owners, who were generously paid. One by one he lures the delegates into these houses, these alleys. Lord Burnley he decoys with the display of a book of his own, strangely inscribed ; that we know. The baits offered to the other gentlemen and ladies we do not yet know fully of,

though a few have come to my knowledge. We shall doubtless eventually have the story of each. Anyhow, one after another, and each in his appropriate manner, the delegates disappear underground. They are then conveyed by Dr. Franchi's employees either underground all the way to the château or to an exit close to the lake, whence they can be secretly embarked by covered boat. By whatever means, they arrive at the château, and are there accommodated in what is known as the Keep Wing, which has the appearance of a large, commodious and many-roomed guest house, but which is as strongly guarded as a prison. They are not ill-treated ; they are made comfortable ; often they dine in company with Dr. Franchi, who enjoys their society and keeps them well amused. I learnt this yesterday from Dr. Franchi's trusted servant, a scoundrel of a Roumanian Baptist, who was moved at last by the persecution of his co-religionists and relatives in Roumania, touchingly set before him by Mademoiselle the Roumanian delegate, to give the League a chance. After many years' faithful service this ruffian

betrayed his master and is assisting me to arrest him. The human heart is truly a strange mixture.

"I have myself, last night, together with the three gentlemen I mentioned, been along the tunnel as far as the château cellar. We could not, of course, then enter it, and we returned the way we came. Dr. Franchi does not know that his secret has been discovered. I have arranged to call on him, with a detachment of police, to-day, in order to inform him of it, arrest him, and release the prisoners. That is all I have to tell you, gentlemen."

44

Murmurs indicative of the utmost interest broke out round the table directly Signor Cristofero stopped speaking. Interest mingled here and there with a little disappointment, for many a cherished theory had to be abandoned or modified. Mr. Macdermott, for instance, had not yet found a place for Sinn Fein in the plot as at present

revealed, nor Mr. O'Shane for Ulster. The Lithuanian delegate was, to say the least of it, surprised that the affair was not more largely due to disbanded Polish soldiers of Zeligowski's army, and the delegates of more than one nation found it strange that the Germans appeared to be out of this thing. But, after all, Dr. Franchi had been only the agent; he might be backed by any one in the world, and doubtless was. Also, he must have had many ruffians in his employ to do the executive work. So no doubt really and in the main things were pretty much as each member of the committee had suspected. The members who looked most gratified were the Latin Americans, from whom suspicion was now honourably lifted (though they regretted that Charles Wilbraham was no longer a suspect), and the Serb-Croat-Slovene delegate, who stared at his Italian colleague with a rather malicious smile. Had he not always said that Italians (unless it were Albanians) had done this thing?

The President, after thanking Signor Cristofero much for his highly interesting

and important information, asked if any other gentleman would like to say anything. The delegate from Bolivia begged to propose that the committee should accompany Signor Cristofero and the police on the visit to the château, as they certainly ought to be present on the occasion. This suggestion was received with universal acclamation, and it was decided that a steamer should take them all up to Monet at six-thirty.

A subdued voice from beside the President's chair inquired whether the press would also be permitted on the expedition. In the excitement, astonishment, and disappointment of Signor Cristofero's story and the prospect of such a stimulating lake trip, the correspondent of the *British Bolshevist* had temporarily forgotten his (or her, as the case might be) own troubles.

The inquiry focused the attention of the committee again on Mr. Beechtree, that dubious, if irrelevant, problem. A smile ran round the room.

The President said that undoubtedly correspondents would be permitted to accompany the expedition, for reports of the day's

discoveries and events must as soon as possible be communicated to the press.

45

Mr. Beechtree, feeling uncomfortable under the general interest and in the intolerable presence of Mr. Wilbraham, slipped away. He wanted privacy to think, to hide from the fire of eyes. More, he wanted coffee. And perhaps a raspberry ice-cream soda with it. There was one place he knew of. . . . Dashing down to the Paquis, he just caught a *mouette* for the Eaux Vives jetty. From there to the ice-cream café was but a short way. He hurried to it, and soon was enjoying the comfort of coffee, a raspberry ice-cream soda, and meringues. After all, there was always that, however bitter a defeat one might suffer at the hands of life. He also had a cocktail.

He drank, ate, and imbibed through straw, to give himself a little courage and cheerfulness in the black bitterness of defeat.

Black bitterness it was, for his long-laid scheme of revenge had toppled, crashing on the top of him, and Charles Wilbraham, eyeing the ruins, hatefully and superciliously smiled, for ever and always in the right. . . .

Charles Wilbraham towered, with his hateful rightness, before Henry's drowsy eyes (how long it was since he had slept !), and he slipped for a moment into a dream, the straw falling from his mouth.

He woke with a start, hastily ate a meringue, called for his bill, and looked at his watch. It was nearly six o'clock. In half an hour the steamer would start for Monet. Well, that at least would be interesting. Henry was all for getting what joy he could out of this uneven life.

He walked across the Jardin Anglais, and saw at the pier the party of pleasure crowding on to a pleasant-looking white steamer called *Jean Jaques*. Pulling his soft hat over his eyes, Henry slipped in among the throng, and embarked on what might well prove to be his last official lake trip. He felt rather shy, for he had become, though in a minor way, News. Women were News ; and women

disguised as men were doubly and trebly News (and Henry felt sure that Charles Wilbraham would be believed on this point rather than he, who had said it was a damned lie).

He slipped through the crowd and took up a nonchalant attitude in the bows, smoking cigarettes and looking at the view.

46

They were a happy and expectant party. The decks hummed with happy and excited talk. All feuds seemed to be healed by the common interest. The committee seemed truly a League of Brothers. This is the value of parties of pleasure. The only people who looked sullen were the group of policemen, for Swiss policemen habitually wear this air.

From group to group, with M. Kratzky at his elbow, moved Charles Wilbraham, complacent, proud, triumphant, like a conjurer who has done a successful trick. "Here is the rabbit, gentlemen," he seemed to be

saying. His colleagues on the Secretariat watched him cynically. Wilbraham had put this job through very well, but how bad it had been for him! Emphatically they did not like Wilbraham.

"And the man who really did the trick has forgotten all about it, and is talking to every one in their own language about the affairs of their own countries," as Vaga the Spaniard remarked. He had a peculiar distaste for Charles.

Grattan came up grinning to Henry.

"Hallo, Beechtree. You seem to have provided one of the sensations of the day. I didn't know you had it in you. I'm sorry your sporting effort to upset our friend Wilbraham failed."

"So am I," Henry gloomily returned. "He deserves to be upset. And I'm not even now sure he hadn't a hand in it all. . . . But of course it's no use saying so. No one will ever believe it of him now that I've mucked it so. They'll believe nothing I say. . . . Did you hear what he said about me at the committee meeting? I suppose every one has."

"Well, I imagine it's got about more or less. Is it true, by the way?"

"On the contrary, a complete and idiotic lie."

The expressionless detachment of Henry's voice and face moved Grattan to mirth.

"That's all right, then; I'll put it about. You keep on smiling, old bean. No one's going to worry, even if it wasn't a lie, you know."

"Wilbraham will worry. He will, no doubt, take steps to have me excluded from the Press Gallery as a disreputable character. I don't particularly mind. What I do mind is that it isn't Wilbraham who's going to get run in for this business, but poor old Franchi. I *like* Franchi. He's delightful, however many delegates he's kidnapped."

"Oh, the more the better. A jolly old sportsman. My word, what a brain! Talk of master criminals, . . . and to think that I once thought the Assembly scarcely worth coming for. Live and learn. I shall never miss another." He called to Garth, who was passing.

"I say, Garth, Beechtree says he's not

a lady and that Wilbraham's a liar. Spread it about, there's a good chap."

Garth nodded. He, like Grattan, believed Wilbraham on this point and not Henry, but it was more comfortable to take Henry at his own valuation. After all, if the chap *was* a woman, whose concern was it but his own? Rather a caddish trick on Wilbraham's part to have publicly accused him. Though, to be sure, he had just been by him publicly accused, so perhaps they were quits. But, poor girl (if she was a girl), she must be feeling up a tree now. She seemed a nice enough person, too; a bit of a fool, of course, but then any one who'd write for the *British Bolshevist*, that pestilential rag, would need to be either a fool or a knave, or both.

So, on the whole, Henry was not acutely uncomfortable among his colleagues of the press.

Once Wilbraham passed close to him talking to the second British delegate, and fixed him with a glassy stare. Henry, refusing to be embarrassed, put up his monocle and stared back, as if surprised at the ill-breeding of this person.

So they came to the Monet pier, as the village church clock chimed seven.

47

The scheme of action had been carefully planned and organised by Signor Cristofero, with the help of the perfidious Roumanian Baptist at the château, who now, terrified at his own treachery, only longed for his master to be removed from the scene. The ex-cardinal, this Baptist had said, meant to dine that night, as he often did when he had not company, with his prisoners in the Keep Wing. He would be there when the detective, the police, the committee, and the press arrived at the château, and the party would be conducted there at once, to surprise the host and his guests at meat.

The delegate from Costa Rica had asked the detective if they should all bring weapons, but Signor Cristofero had said no.

"Quite unnecessary. Franchi does not go armed. He does not go in for bloodshed, except for some necessary purpose. When he

sees he is trapped, he will throw down his hand with resignation. After all, the penalty for the abduction without injury, even of many delegates, is not very heavy. A term of imprisonment, then he will be free again. He intended, of course, to make his escape from the neighbourhood when he released his prisoners, and so be beyond reach of capture when the truth came out. He will be mortified at the failure of his plan—in so far as it has failed—but for himself he will not very greatly care. I know Dr. Franchi of old."

So revolvers were only taken by delegates and journalists of those nations which regard these weapons as a natural part of the human equipment for facing society.

As they trailed up from the Monet pier through the village, the party had the innocuous, cheerful, plebeian, only-man-is-vile air of all large parties of pleasure in beautiful country.

They approached the château by its public drive, which turned off the road beyond the village. Signor Cristofero knocked on the front door, which was opened by a villainous

looking young man whom the party presumed to be the repentant Roumanian Baptist, and whom Signor Cristofero addressed fluently in a tongue even stranger than are most tongues. The young man replied in the same.

"Dr. Franchi is in the Keep Wing, dining with the delegates," Signor Cristofero informed his companions. "This man will conduct us there and admit us. He has the pass keys."

The party, led by the scowling Baptist, trooped into the château like a party of eager tourists ciceroned by a sulky guide.

They passed through the hall, through the company of dogs who seemed to like everybody except Henry and the delegate from Haiti, and thence along a sunny, airy corridor which led up to a nail-studded, triple-locked oak door, behind an ecclesiastical leather curtain. The Roumanian produced three keys, unlocked the door, and led the way along a further passage, this time only lighted by high, small windows. Here began the Keep Wing. At the farther end of this corridor was another oak door,

this time only once locked. From beyond it came the sound of cheerful voices raised in talk and laughter. The Roumanian hung back. He obviously did not desire to lead the way any farther. After a short, low-toned conversation with Signor Cristofero, he went back through the triple-locked door.

"He fears his master," the detective remarked, with a shrug. "He is going to make his escape from the château, lest the other servants execute vengeance on him. No matter. We are now arrived."

Having with a gesture summoned round him the police, he opened the door and led the way into the room beyond.

It was a large refectory, with a long table down the middle. At the near end of it sat Dr. Franchi, with lifted glass; down the sides were ranged the lost delegates. One of them—perhaps Lord Burnley, who sat on his host's right—seemed to have been telling an amusing story, for all at the near end of the table were laughing. Or rather, nearly all: for, resolute in its gravity, its air of protest, the face of Lord John Lester,

the mainstay of the League, was bent sadly over a dish of salted almonds.

The ex-cardinal had barely time to look round at the noise of entry before three policemen seized him firmly and snapped handcuffs on his wrists.

48

It was a scene the like of which, it is safe to say, had never before been seen among all the strange scenes which had been enacted along the shores of that most lovely lake. A strange scene, and a strange company.

The faces of some thirty delegates, interrupted in their meal, were turned, with varying expressions, upon the new-comers. Lord John Lester sprang to his feet, with an impatient cry of "At last!" which was, however, drowned by the ecstatic croon of Mademoiselle the delegate for Roumania, "Ah! mon Dieu! Nous sommes sauvés! Un jour de plus, et nous serions deportées," and a loud cry from Miss Gina Longfellow,

who sprang from her seat at the other end of the table.

"Dio mio! We sure are copped!"

"Arrest the lady also, as an accomplice," remarked Signor Cristofero quietly.

Dr. Franchi suddenly began to struggle violently, thus engaging the attention of the police. As suddenly, he ceased to struggle, and said calmly, "Ebbene. E scappata," and it was apparent that Miss Longfellow had vanished.

"You will not find her now," said her uncle. "She knows where to hide. Besides, what has she done, the innocent?"

"The passages are guarded," Signor Cristofero remarked.

"Not, I think, my dear Angelo," said Dr. Franchi, looking at him for the first time, "the passage she will take. . . . So, Angelo, this is your work. I might have guessed. Gentlemen, my only and distinguished brother."

With a bow he introduced Signor Cristofero to his guests.

The detective smiled grimly at him, and

addressed him in the Italian of the Lombardy Alps.

"This point is mine, I think, Silvio. It is a long war between us, in which you often score, but this point is mine."

"I grant it you, my dear Angelo, without rancour. Your abilities have always been so near the level of my own that I can take defeat at your hands without mortification. You will at least pay me the tribute of acknowledging the ingenuity and partial success of my scheme."

"That tribute I always pay you, Silvio. But, as has occasionally happened before, your ingenuity broke down at one point. You yielded to a whimsical impulse, and sent to the officials of the League a certain telegram couched in the words of the English version of a Hebrew psalm. When I heard this, I, remembering your addiction to the English translation of the psalms, identified you at once. . . . But this is no time for conversation. Later, a statement will be demanded of you. At present my business is to deliver you over to the law, and to give these gentlemen their liberty."

"You will find no difficulty in either, my dear brother. . . . This, then, gentlemen and ladies, is good-bye. I must apologise for any inconvenience that may have been caused by your detention, either to yourselves or to the society which you represent, and I must thank you for the great pleasure you have afforded me by your company. I think that, at least, you will be able to report that you have suffered no great discomforts while my guests."

"We have been most excellently entertained," Lord Burnley replied, and a murmur of assent ran round the table.

The Albanian Bishop rose to his feet, lifting his glass.

"Your health, sir," he said, and the other delegates drank the toast. (All except Lord John Lester, who impatiently muttered "Pshaw!")

"Indeed," said Mlle. Binesco, "Dr. Franchi has been more than kind. Another few days, and we might have fallen into the hands of the iniquitous traffickers behind him and been deported overseas—but he

personally has been most good to us. *All* we could want. . . ."

Fergus Macdermott had pushed to the front of the interested onlookers.

"I'd like to ask you one question, sir. Why didn't your people finish the job they began on myself—if it was your people, and not, as I suspect, some Sinn Fein scoundrels?"

The ex-cardinal gave his kindly smile.

"It was certainly my people, Mr. Macdermott. But, in attacking you, they made a mistake. When they perceived who you were, they desisted. They had, you see, orders not to remove certain delegates, of whom you and your colleague from South Ireland were two, from the scene. It was considered that the Irish delegates would serve the cause I have the honour to represent better by their presence at the Assembly than by their absence from it."

"Enough talk," Signor Cristofero put in. "It is time we went."

"Brief and to the point as ever, dear brother. Good-bye, then, gentlemen and ladies. I regret, Lord Burnley, not to have

had time in which to finish the interesting conversation we began last night on the subject of my present book. It will have to keep for happier days. Meanwhile, I hope to have a quiet little time in which to meditate on and complete the book."

As he passed Henry Beechtree on his way to the door, he stopped.

"Ah, my dear young man. Luck did not favour our little plan, did it?"

"That person," said the disagreeable voice of Charles Wilbraham, "is, if I may be allowed to mention it, a young woman, Dr. Franchi."

The ex-cardinal turned to him a cold face.

"I have known that, Mr. Wilbraham, a good deal longer than you have." He smiled sweetly at Henry.

"Yes, my young friend. There was an incident, you may recollect, of a goldfish. . . . I have several—er—nephews and nieces —and have watched them grow up. Never yet have I seen the boys disturbed by such episodes. Masculine nerves are, as a rule, more robust. You should remember this in future. . . . You will pardon my having

noticed the incident. I would never have referred to it had not the subject been raised. Some day you shall dine with me again, if you will. . . . But my good brother grows impatient. Good-bye again, my friends. A rivederci."

He was led away. He would be taken to Geneva in a police launch, with the detective, the police, and the arrested servants. The delegates and press were to follow in the steamer.

49

The return journey of the rescuers and the rescued was a happy one indeed. If fraternity had prevailed on the outward voyage, now far more were all (or most) hearts knit together. What happy greetings were exchanged, what stories related, what mysteries made clear! The happy press were told the tale of each captured delegate; they learnt of the pursuit after vice of the two public-spirited ladies, and their consequent entrapment, of the decoy of Lord

John Lester through his devotion to the Union of the League, of how Professor Inglis had been betrayed through his pity for the poor Greek woman, of how Dr. Chang, leaving the Bergues hotel at midnight, had taken a walk through the Saint Gervais quarter, and been led by the smell of opium to investigate a mysterious opium den whose floor had failed beneath his feet and dropped him into an underground passage, along which he had been conducted to an exit close to the Seujet Wharf, hustled into a covered boat, and carried up the lake. Many such strange tales the released captives told, and the journalists took down breathlessly on their writing-pads. Geneva, one perceived, must be full of the paid agents of the ex-cardinal and the society which employed him. Not that Dr. Franchi had told his captives anything of this society; he had merely said that he was anxious for good company, and had therefore taken the liberty of capturing the pick of the eminent persons present at Geneva and entertaining them as his guests.

"If you knew, gentlemen," he had said,

" how one wearies for a little intelligence, a little wit, a little *bonhomie*, in this dour country ! "

Naturally, they had not believed him, but some of them had been, all the same, a little flattered at their own selection.

They had had, it seemed, a delightful time. Books, newspapers, delicate food and wines, games, conversation, everything except liberty, had been provided for their delectation.

" One can't help, in some ways, being even a little sorry it is at an end," Lord Burnley murmured, as he watched the lights of the château recede, and thought of the dusty days of labour which were to follow.

" If only it's not too late—if only irretrievable damage has not been done," muttered Lord John Lester, frowning at the same lights, thinking of the vast agenda for the session, and of the growling nations of the world.

" I think," the voice of Charles Wilbraham came, high and conceited, to Henry Beechtree as he lurked disgraced in a corner and listened and watched, " I think we may

say we have put a spoke in the wheel of these scoundrels this time. Yes ; *I* think we may say that. . . ."

50

Henry that night packed his things. He was leaving next day. He was not going to wait to be dismissed by his paper. He knew that, if he did not go, he would with ignominy be removed.

So he packed, in his small hot room after dinner, with the cats and dogs uttering their cries in the courtyard below, and beyond them the small whispering cry of water beating and shuffling against the wharf.

His adventure was over. In fact, Henry must now be called Miss Montana, for such was, in truth, her name, and such, as Charles Wilbraham had truly said, her sex.

How superciliously had he said it, how superciliously staring her down the while. As, long ago, he had superciliously stared her down when he had said to his secretary, " This cannot go on, Miss Montana.

I must make another arrangement. Particularly in view of Paris. . . ."

Particularly in view of Paris. Ah, yes, that was the sting. Who would have wanted to go on being Charles Wilbraham's secretary but for Paris? For to that heaven of secretaries, the Paris Peace Conference, Charles had been called, and was going that month, January, 1919. She had been going with him. What delight! What a world of joy had opened before her when she heard it! What a peace! It would make up for all the weary years of war, all the desolating months of servitude to Charles Wilbraham. And now, within a fortnight of starting, Charles said he must make another arrangement. For his secretary had shown gross carelessness, hopeless incompetence: she had done a frightful thing. She had put a Foreign Office letter into an envelope addressed to the Archbishop of Westminster, and vice versa, and so despatched them. It was the climax, so Charles told her, of a long series of misdeeds. Also, she was slow on the typewriter, spelt Parliament with a small p, and used the eraser

too frequently, and you could, said Charles, see the smudge made by that a mile off. So—in fine, Charles must make another arrangement and must in fact, in point of fact, he unctuously told her, ask her forthwith to take a minute to the establishment, bidding them obtain for him another secretary. The bitterness of that moment swept back to Henry now across the years. She remembered how, wordless, sullen, and fighting that dizziness that attacked her in moments of stress, she had stood before him, loathing his smooth voice, his lofty choice of words, his whole arrogant, pompous presence. Then he had dictated the minute.

" *From* Mr. Wilbraham.

" *To* the Establishment Branch.

" I find I have to make other arrangements about a secretary. I shall be glad if you will transfer Miss Montana to other work, and send some one to me more thoroughly efficient. It would be well if I could have a selection up for interview and make a choice, preferably after a preliminary trial. The work will be responsible, as I am

going out to the Peace Conference in a fortnight.

"8.1.1919."

"Kindly see," Charles had ordered her, "that that is typed and goes down immediately. I shall be glad to have it for initialing in not more than five minutes from now."

That had been the way Charles had always addressed his secretaries; Charles was like that. Courtesy to a subordinate was, in his view, wholly wasted. He kept all he had of it for his superiors. "The only really rude man in the Ministry," Henry had heard him called by the typists, and typists always know.

Miss Montana had been subsequently transferred to the Establishment Branch, where she had spent her time typing chits about other people's salaries and appointments. Finally, when the staff was reduced, she was the first to be dismissed. She had never been to Paris; never seen the Peace Conference. Charles, with first one bullied secretary, now another, had moved on his

triumphant way from conference to conference, a tour unbroken by his appointment to the staff of the League of Nations Secretariat. Miss Montana had never been to a conference in her life.

In her loafing, idle and poor, about London, with her idle and poor brother and her Irish journalist lover, bitterness had grown more bitter. No money, no prospects, no career. Only chance bits of free-lance journalism, not enough to pay the rent of decent rooms. She had vowed to be revenged on Charles, but no way presented itself. She had prayed God to send her to some bright continental place with a sunny climate and if possible with some sort of conference going on, but no ladder thereto reared itself for her climbing. Her lover, a young man from Dublin, who wrote for, among other papers, the *British Bolshevist*, went out to represent this journal at the League Assembly at Geneva one year. He fell foul there of Charles Wilbraham, who objected to his messages, which, indeed, were not in the best of taste; but, as he said, if you write for vulgar papers you must

send vulgar messages sometimes or they won't print you. Charles had him boycotted from public dinners, and otherwise annoyed. Hearing of it, Miss Montana consecrated afresh her vow to be revenged on Charles. The next year this journalist was to have gone to Geneva again, but instead he encountered an Orange bullet while reporting a riot in Belfast on August 15th, and was still laid up with the effects at the beginning of September. Then Miss Montana had conceived her brilliant idea. She would take his place. She would get back on Charles. She would disguise herself so that he would not know her if they met, and somehow she would be avenged. Incidentally, she would have a conference, in a bright continental climate, and earn some money.

Eventually she had persuaded the young man to write to the *Bolshevist* telling them that he had a journalist friend already in Geneva, one Henry Beechtree, who might safely be entrusted with the not onerous job of reporting the proceedings of the Assembly for them. The *Bolshevist* did not really

much care who did this job, or how it was done, so they accepted the services of this Mr. Beechtree.

Thus, for Miss Montana, opened out at once an entertaining adventure, a temporary and scanty means of livelihood, and a chance of revenge. Surely now, knowing what she knew of Charles (for she had worked hard to collect injurious facts), she could somehow bring him to indignity and disgrace. How she had worked for this end ! How patiently she had schemed, waited, watched, prayed, made friends with a dull girl, followed Charles about. . . . Let him wait, she had said ; only let Charles wait. And now had come her hour, and it had, after all, turned on her and proved to be, as always, the hour not of herself, but of Charles. Charles was in the right ; she was in the wrong. Charles (she might have known it) had done nothing so unseemly as to retain armament shares while entering the staff of the League; Charles had transferred his money to beer. Charles had not conspired against the League. Rather had Charles conceived the clever idea of engaging a famous detective to solve the

mystery, and triumphantly he had had it solved. Charles emerged from this business, as always from every business, with credit; Charles was triumphantly in the right.

It came to Miss Montana afresh, what she had really always known, that the Charleses of this world always are in the right. You cannot put them in the wrong. They put you in the wrong, for ever and ever. They may be all wrong, within and without, but they cannot be in the wrong. The wrong is in them, not they in it. However false, selfish, complacent, arrogant, and abominable a life Charles might have led, one would know that at the Judgment Day he would somehow be in the right. . . . Right with God, Charles would be, and contemptuously and without surprise he would watch his neighbours' condemnation. Had he not joined the True Church to make sure of this ultimate rightness, and because it was fashionable just now? Much Charles cared for religion! If Catholics were once more to be persecuted instead of admired, how soon would Charles leave them! Yes,

Charles would always be in the right with the best people. . . .

The heart and soul of Miss Montana went out passionately across land and sea to her wild journalist lover in Dublin, that poor and reckless failure, with whom nothing went right, who had scarcely a shilling to his name nor an ounce of health in his body. He was more than all the Charles Wilbrahams of the world together ; infinitely more brilliant, more valuable, more alive ; but never did he succeed, for life was not on his side. And now he would lose his job on the *British Bolshevist* (not that that mattered much), and be further discredited, for perpetrating this fraud which had been so unfortunately exposed. He would go under, deeper and deeper under, and so would she. The underworld, that vague and fearful place, would receive them. His generous and trusting love for her had joined with his love of a joke to sink him. Together they would sink, and over their bodies Charles Wilbraham would climb, as on stepping-stones, to higher things. Higher and higher, plumping with prosperity like

a filbert in the sun, while his eyes dropped fatness, and his corn and wine and oil increased. . . .

Thus bitterly mused Miss Montana, sitting in her grimy room by her shabby gladstone bag, throwing therein her pyjamas, her socks, her collars, her safety razor, her passport (the passport was about Denis O'Neill, but it had served Henry Beechtree well enough ; there is one advantage about passports : the nonsensical story on them is seldom read, nor the foolish portrait glanced at).

To-morrow she would walk once more about the romantic, clean, and noble city, look her last on the most lovely lake, visit the ice-cream café and perhaps go up Salève, which she had not yet had time to do. Or up the lake to Nyons. She would not visit the Assembly Hall or the Secretariat, for by those she encountered there she would be looked at askance. She had made a fool of herself and been made a fool of, and she had, it would be supposed, tried to make a fool of Committee 9 in order to spite Charles Wilbraham. She would be thought no gentleman, even no lady. And yet, did

they but know it, she had accused Charles in good faith, though with such rancour as they would be amazed to know of, such rancour as Serb-Croat-Slovenes scarce feel against Albanians, or Bolsheviks against Bourgeoisie.

Miss Montana, past laughter, past tears, past sleep, and even now past hate, considered for a while where comfort could best be sought, then crept down the crazy winding staircase of her lodgings and so to the lake's edge. She would take a boat and have a last moonlight row.

51

The September days went by, and once again, on the shores of that most lovely lake, the nations assembled and talked.

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